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BETHANY

OR

COMFORT IN SORROW

AND

HOPE IN DEATH

CANDLISH

BETHANY

OR

Comfort in Sorrow and Hope in Death

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OR

Comfort in Sorrow and Hope in Death

BY

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PREFATORY NOTE.

THIS little Volume, consisting of papers selected from the Author's published works, is issued in the hope that, in this form, they may be welcome to readers to whom he would gladly be useful.

EDINBURGH, *November* 1870.

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I.

MARTHA AND MARY—THEIR COMMON BUT DIVERSE GRIEF DIVERSELY COMFORTED.

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning: but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." Such is the voice of wisdom (Eccles. vii. 2-4). If this is true generally as to the effect which should be produced by familiarising the heart with the devout contemplation of death, and of the grief which death occasions, it must be especially true when we have Jesus as our companion.

It was our Lord's custom, in his visits to Jerusalem at the feasts, to retire in the evening, after the toils and trials of his daily ministry

in the temple, to the quiet village of Bethany, and the peaceful abode of Lazarus. There he found the rest and repose which he needed, in the holy endearments of a congenial family circle;—the nearest approach, for him who "had not where to lay his head," to the warm heartiness of home.

That house is now the house of mourning. Let us visit it in the company of Jesus; and let us observe how he is received there, and how his presence cheers the gloom.

The sisters, Martha and Mary, greet him with the same pathetic salutation, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." And this might seem to indicate an entire similarity in their sorrow. But if we look a little closer, we see a striking difference of demeanour, corresponding to the manifest difference of their characters generally. And this difference is marked in our Lord's different treatment of them. In every view, this record of sisterly affection is an interesting study. We may learn from it, on the one hand, how much sameness there is in grief, as also, how much variety; and, on the other hand, how much compass there

is in the consolation of Christ, as capable of being adapted to all varieties of grief—to grief of every mould and of every mood. I speak chiefly throughout of the grief of true Christians; for I am surely warranted in assuming that, notwithstanding their great contrast in respect of natural temperament, the two sisters were partakers of the same grace.

Part First—Common Grief.

Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. John xi. 21, 32.

It is remarkable that two persons so different in their turn of mind, as we shall afterwards see that these sisters were,—so apt to view things in different lights, and to be affected by them with different feelings,—should both utter the very same words on first meeting the Lord Jesus: "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." It shows how natural such a reflection is in such a season; how entirely the heart, when deeply moved, is the same in all; and how much all grief is alike.

The sisters, however otherwise dissimilar, were united in their fond affection for their departed brother, as well as in their grateful reliance on that divine friend "who loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." They had sat and watched together beside their brother's bed of sickness. They joined together in "sending unto Jesus, saying, Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." In their distress they both thought of the same remedy, and applied to the same physician. It was a joint petition that they despatched, and they did not doubt that it would prevail. Together they waited anxiously for his coming. They reckoned the very earliest moment when he could arrive; and as they looked on their brother's languid eye, and saw him sinking every hour and wasting away,—ah! they thought how soon their benefactor might appear, and all might yet be well. But moments and hours rolled on, and no Saviour came. Wearisome days and nights were appointed to them. Often did they look out and listen; often did they fancy that they heard the expected sound, and the well-known accents of

kindness seemed to fall upon their ears. But still he came not. Ah! what were their anxious thoughts, their earnest communings,—their fond prayers that life might be prolonged at least for a little longer,—to give one other chance, one other opportunity, for the interposition of him who was mighty to save even from the gates of death! And how were their own hearts sickened, as they whispered to the sick man a faint hope, to which they could scarcely themselves any longer cling! Still the time rolls slowly on. The last ray of expectation is extinguished; the dreaded hour has come; it is over. Their brother has fallen asleep. Lazarus is dead.

And now four days are past and gone since he has been laid in the silent tomb. The first violence of grief is giving place to the more calm, but far more bitter pain of a desolate and dreary sadness,—the prolonged sense of bereavement which recollection brings along with it, and which everything around serves to aggravate and embitter. The house of mourning, after the usual temporary excitement, is still. It is the melancholy stillness of the calm, darkly

brooding over the wrecks of the recent storm. And amid the real kindness of sympathising friends, and the formal attentions of officious strangers, the sisters, as each familiar object recalls the past, are soothing or suppressing as best they may those bitter feelings which their own hearts alone can know;—when suddenly they are told that Jesus is at hand!

He is come at last. But is it not too late?

His having come at all, however, is a comfort. He is welcome as their own and their brother's friend; he is welcome as their Lord. They never doubt his friendship; they do not question his willingness or his power to do them good. But still, when they meet him, they cannot but look back on the few days that are gone. And as all their anxieties and alarms, their longing hopes and cruel disappointments, rush again upon their minds, they are constrained to give utterance to the crowded emotions of their hearts in the irrepressible exclamation of regret,—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

It is the voice of nature that speaks in these words,—the voice of our common nature, ming-

ling its vain reflections with the resignation of sincere and simple faith.

There is here, first, the feeling that the event might have been otherwise: "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. Mightest thou not have been here?"

We know not what has detained thee. Some call of duty may have prevented thee from coming; or perhaps our message did not reach thee in time; or it may have been some merely casual circumstance that hindered thee. If this sickness had happened but a little sooner, when thou wast in Jerusalem at the feast; or if we had taken alarm early enough, so as to send for thee before our brother was so ill; or if our messenger had been more expeditious, and had used more despatch; or if we had but been able to lengthen out, by our care, our brother's sickness for a single week;—had we not been so unfortunate in the occurrence of this evil just when it did occur; or had we, when it occurred, used more diligence, and taken better precautions;—then thou mightest have been here. And, "if thou hadst been here, our brother had not died."

Is it not thus that the heart speaks under every trying dispensation? Is it not thus that an excited imagination whispers to the forlorn soul?

Who has ever met with any affliction—who has ever lost any beloved brother or dear friend —without cherishing some such reflection as this?—If such or such a measure had been adopted; if such or such an accident had not happened; if it had not been for this unaccountable oversight or that unforeseen and unavoidable mischance; so grievous a calamity would not have befallen me,—my brother would not have died.

Alas! alas! the reflection, however natural, is only a sinful and sad delusion;—proceeding upon a very limited view of the power and the providence of God our Saviour. How did these sisters know that, if Jesus had been there, their brother would not have died? How could they tell whether he might not have ends to serve, which would have required that, even though he had been there, he must have permitted their brother to die? And were they not aware that, though he was not there, yet, if

he had so chosen and so ordered it, their brother would not have died? Had they not heard of his being able, at the distance of many a long mile, to effect an immediate and complete cure of the most deadly disease? Did they not believe that he had but to speak, and it would be done; he had but to say the word, and, however far off he was, his friend and their brother would be healed? Ah! they had forgotten who it was to whom they made this most touching and pathetic appeal; that he was one who, though not actually present, could have restored their brother if it had been consistent with his wise and holy will; and that he was also one who, even if he had been present, might have seen fit, for the best reasons, to suffer their brother to die.

And are not these the very truths concerning the Lord Jesus Christ which, in your distress, even you who believe in him are tempted to forget, when you dwell so much on secondary circumstances and causes, instead of at once and immediately recognising his will as supreme?

You are overtaken by sudden misfortune; you

are overwhelmed in the depths of sorrow. You ascribe your suffering to what seems to be its direct occasion;—whether it be your own neglect of some precaution which you might have taken, had you thought of it in time; or the fault of others, with whose skill or diligence your dearest hopes were inseparably connected; or something perhaps, in the course of events, over which neither you nor they could have any control. You fix upon the very date, the very scene, when and where your brother's doom seems to have been sealed. And this is your train of thought: If we had but suspected what was about to be the issue, or if the help which we now see would have been available had then been within our reach;—if we had been warned in time, or had taken the warning, or had been able to employ the right means of escape;—we might not now have been left disconsolate. Our beloved one might have still been spared to cheer us with his smiles, and share with us all our cares. Our brother might not have died.

So you are apt to think and feel. But however natural the reflection, is it not in reality

the very folly of unbelief,—the dream of a soul forgetting that the Lord reigneth?

What! is it come to this, that you conceive of him as limited by events which he himself ordains,—as the slave of his own laws?

You think that if a certain obstacle had not come in to prevent relief, the calamity which you bewail might not have happened. But, notwithstanding that obstacle, might he not, if he had seen fit, have found means to avert the calamity? And are you sure that, even if the obstacle had been removed, he might not have seen fit still to let the calamity come? "If thou hadst been here," say the mourning sisters, "our brother had not died." "Nay," he might have answered, "I could have been here if it had seemed good to me; and, though I was not here, I could have kept your brother alive; and, though I had been here, I might, in very love to him and to you, have allowed your brother to die."

Look, ye afflicted ones, beyond second causes, to him who is the First Cause of all things! Believe and be sure that the circumstances which you regret as the occasion of your misfortune,

are but the appointed means of bringing about what he determines. If evil comes upon you, if your brother dies, it is not because this or that accident prevented relief; it is not because your Lord and Saviour was not with you in sufficient time;—but because it was his sovereign and gracious will. "Be still, and know that he is God!"

But further, secondly, there may be in this address of the sisters somewhat of the feeling, that the event not only might, but should have been otherwise. There is at least an intimation of their having expected that the event would have been otherwise: "If thou hadst been here, our brother had not died."

And why wert thou not here? We sent to thee,—we sent a special message,—a special prayer,—and surely thou mightst have been persuaded to come. Ah! why didst thou linger for two whole days after tidings of our threatened loss reached thee? Why didst thou not make haste to help us? We could not believe that thou wouldst have treated us thus. Thou wast not unmindful of us before. Thou

didst regard us as thy friends. Thou didst bless our house with thy presence; making it thy resting-place, thy home. Thou didst choose us before thine own kinsmen. Thou didst select our brother as the object of thine especial affection. And we thought it would have been enough to touch thy heart simply to send to thee, saying, "He whom thou lovest is sick." We thought thou hadst but to hear of his illness to hasten at once to his relief. True, we had no right to dictate to thee, and now we have no right to complain. But we cannot help feeling that "If thou hadst been here our brother had not died;" and that surely thou mightst have been here. It was not so very great a favour that was asked of thee; and was he not worthy for whom we asked thee to do it? He loved thee, —he trusted in thee; and thou mightst have come, if not to preserve his life, at least to soothe and satisfy his dying hours. He looked for thee, and thou didst not appear. To the very last he waited for thee, and thou didst hide thyself. He missed thee, and he was not comforted.

Such are the instinctive complaints of nature

in a season of sore trial, of bitter bereavement. Thus the wounded soul rises against the stroke that pierces it, and turns round upon the hand that smites it. It is very hard for flesh and blood to believe, in regard to any crushing load of woe, that it is God who directly and immediately ordains it. It is far harder to believe, that in ordaining it he does not do wrong. Simply to be still, and know that he is God, is no easy exercise of resignation. To be sure that what he does is right, that all he does is done well, is even more difficult still.

You fancy that, if he had really been here, it would have happened otherwise,—your brother would not have died. And you feel as if you had had some right to expect that he should have been here,—that it should have happened otherwise,—that your brother should not have died. And you can give, perhaps, many reasons. You can point out many ends which might have been served had your brother been spared,—how faithful and successful he might have been,—how noble a course he might have run. He was just prepared for entering into active life; he was just newly fitted for the

service of God in the world; and it does seem strange and unaccountable, that at the very time when his life seemed to have become most valuable, when his character was ripened for increased usefulness, and when the mere word of the great Physician would have brought him back from the gates of death, he should yet have been suffered to die!

Ah! but remember that in all this the Lord may have many purposes in view with which you may be unacquainted,—which indeed you could not as yet comprehend. Only wait patiently for a little, and you will see that "this sickness is not" really "unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby" (ver. 4).

Would that thou hadst been here!—thou surely mightst have been here!—is the natural language of the mourner to his Lord. Nay, says the Lord to his disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe" (ver. 15). A hard saying this,—who can always hear it?

But consider who it is that speaks to you when you say "If thou hadst been here." It

is your friend, your Saviour. He might have been here, and might have taken care that your brother should not die. And may you not be sure that, if it had been for God's glory, and for your good, he would have been here, and would have taken care that your brother should not die? He might have ordered this matter otherwise, you say; and you almost think that he ought to have ordered it otherwise. But may you not believe that, had it been right and good, he would have done so: and that, if he has not, it must be for the best of reasons?

What these may be you cannot now guess. He may have need of your brother's services elsewhere. He may intend to make his death the occasion of showing forth God's glory, and blessing your soul. Only be patient, and hope unto the end. What he doeth you may not know now, but you shall know hereafter. Meantime, when you are tempted to fancy that he might have interfered—nay, that he should have interfered—to prevent the calamity under which you suffer, may not that very feeling, on second thoughts, suggest the conviction, that if he has not so interfered, it must

be because he intends to make to you some gracious discovery of himself, and to confer upon you some special benefit? Be not hasty, then, to judge, but rest in the assurance that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. And though he may seem to stand aloof when you would most desire, and when you most need, his interposition, yet when he does come, be sure that you receive him gladly—as did the sorrowing sisters.

For, lastly, there is apparent in the address of the sisters a sincere, though melancholy satisfaction in meeting with Jesus when he comes. He has not come so soon as they expected. He has not come at the very time, in the very way, for the very purpose, that they could have wished. Still, when he does come, at whatsoever time, and for whatsoever purpose, he is welcome. He is come too late to do them that particular favour which they solicited: still he is come for good, and gratefully do they receive him. True, they say, as if almost in complaint, "Lord, if thou hadst been here sooner, our brother had not died."

But thou art here now; and it is enough. Our brother, indeed, is dead,—and, if it had been possible, we would have had it otherwise. We expected that thou wouldst have come; we wondered that thou didst not come;—for a time, perhaps, we entertained some doubtful and hard thoughts of thee, as if surely thou mightst have come. But now that thou hast come, we are satisfied. We are sure that had it been possible, consistently with the high ends of thy ministry, and consistently with our own real interest, thou wouldst have been here. We see that thou lovest and carest for us; and though thou didst not at once grant our request precisely as we desired, yet not the less on that account do we take thy visit kindly. Thou art still our best friend, our gracious Lord. "We know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." At thy feet we will still lie down. That thou hast come at all, at our solicitation, is great condescension. That thou hast come in such an hour of trouble is a peculiarly seasonable act of friendship.

Happy will it be for you who mourn, if in like circumstances you are enabled to feel as these sisters felt, and to meet your Saviour's gracious advances as they did. In the hour of blighted prospects and disappointed hopes, when the evil which you deprecated has befallen you, you may think that consolation comes too late. Like Rachel, you may weep and refuse to be comforted. Like Jonah, when your gourd withers, you may almost be tempted to say that you do well to be angry. You may turn away when your Saviour draws near; you may sit disconsolate when he calls. If he had come for the purpose of averting the calamity,—if he had been here sooner, and had interposed his power to help,—it had been well, for then my brother had not died. But the calamity has overtaken me,—my brother is dead; and what avails it that he is here now?

Beware of all such impatience, such natural irritability of grief. Reject not the Saviour's visit of sympathy now, because he did not come to you exactly as you in your ignorance would have had him to come, and did not do for you

exactly what you would have had him to do. It is enough that he is with you now;—to speak comfortably to you, to bind up your broken heart, to fill the aching void in your affections, and be to you instead of all that you have lost. True, if he had been here before, your brother might not have died. And your brother, alas! is dead. But he is here now,—he who is better than a thousand brothers,—he who hath the words of eternal life,—he who can speak a word in season to the weary soul, and who, when flesh and heart faint, will be the strength of your heart and your portion for ever.

Such might be the feelings common to the two sisters,—such are the feelings of nature mingled with grace common to all sanctified grief,—as indicated in the affecting address, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Part Second.

Diverse Grief Diversely Comforted.

Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him ; but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. . . Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.—John xi. 20, 21, 32.

The simple and pathetic exclamation that bursts from the lips of the two bereaved sisters, as they separately meet with Jesus, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," cannot but find an echo in every breast that has ever mourned over a loss like theirs. The feeling which it expresses is so natural, that we may almost call it the very instinct of grief. We reflect on what has happened, with a vague idea of its having been possible somehow to avert it. Nor is the expression of the feeling always sinful, if it be to Jesus himself that we express it. He would have us, indeed, to open our minds and hearts without reserve to him ; for it is better that our complaint should be

poured into his ear than that it should be pent up in our own bosoms; and the relief which the utterance of it affords may lead to calmer and holier thoughts. Thus, in the present instance, the mourners, amid their very upbraiding of Jesus, as some might count it, were warm and cordial in the welcome which they gave him. They spoke the language common to all deep and recent sorrow, when they bewailed the untoward accident but for which, as they imagined, the event might have been ordered otherwise. But at the same time they gave evidence of their being under the influence of genuine faith in Jesus and tender love to him, when they hailed his visit so affectionately as they did, and accepted with meek and grateful resignation his seasonable fellowship and sympathy.

Thus far we trace, in their first appeals to their common Saviour and friend, the working of a common emotion of regret, seeking rest in him.

But the sisters differed in their sorrow, as they did generally in the leading features of

their characters, and their manner of thinking and acting in the ordinary affairs of life. They were persons of very different tempers and dispositions; and this difference is uniformly and strikingly brought out in their treatment of the Lord Jesus. Both of them looked up to him with reverence; both of them regarded him with full confidence and tender affection; and they were equally earnest and eager in testifying their esteem and love. But each in doing so followed the bent of her own peculiar turn of mind.

Martha was distinguished by a busy, if not bustling activity in the despatch of affairs. She seems to have possessed great quickness, alertness, energy; along with a certain practical ability and good sense; both together qualifying her for taking a lead herself, and for giving an impulse to others. She was on this account well fitted for going through with any work to be done, and she was always awake to the common calls and the common cares of the ordinary domestic routine of life. Mary, again, was evidently characterised by more depth of thought, more devotedness and sensibility of

feeling. She was more easily engrossed in any affecting scene, or in any spiritual subject; more alivé at any time to one single profound impression, and apt to be abstracted from other concerns.

Hence, as we find it stated on a former occasion, when our Lord was received in their house, while "Mary sat at his feet and heard his word," "Martha was cumbered with much serving." She was assiduous, and even officious, in her hospitable anxiety to provide for the accommodation of her guest; and if Jesus had come "to be ministered unto," he would have been best pleased with Martha's attention to all his wants. But as he came, "not to be ministered unto, but to minister," he found greater delight in her sister Mary, who, with the meekness of a disciple, and the earnestness of a spiritually-awakened soul, listened to the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Accordingly, when "Martha said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me,"—"Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled

about many things: but one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke x. 40-42). Thus the sisters showed their respective characters in their manner of waiting upon the divine visitor whom it was their privilege to entertain in their house as a highly-honoured guest and a much-valued friend.

And as their ways of testifying regard to the Lord Jesus in their prosperity differed, so also did their respective modes of demeanour towards him in their adversity.

Martha was evidently the first to receive information of his approach (ver. 20). This might be either because to her, as the mistress of the house, the message was brought; or because, going about the house in her usual manner, she was in the way of hearing intelligence. She went out in haste, impatient to meet the Lord, and to render to him the offices of courtesy and respect. She is ready to be up and doing; she can turn at once from the conversation in which her friends from Jerusalem have been seeking to interest her, and disengage her mind for active exertion.

Mary is more absorbed in her grief. Her sorrow is of a deeper and more desponding character. While "Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him, Mary sat still in the house" (ver. 20).

This more engrossing and absorbing intensity of Mary's grief, "the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforted her," seem to have remarked, when they said of her, as they saw her at last rise hastily and go out, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there" (ver. 31). They had not said that of Martha when she went forth. She might be bent on other errands in the house; Mary could be going—only to weep at the grave.

And at first her feelings so overpower her as to prevent her from going at all. The sudden arrival of her brother's friend is a shock too great for her; it tears the wound open afresh, and recalls bitter thoughts. She is plunged by the tidings into a fresh burst of sorrow, and can only "sit still in the house" (ver. 20).

Thus, in different circumstances, the same

natural temper may be either an advantage or a snare.

Martha was never so much occupied in the emotion of one scene or subject as not to be on the alert and ready for the call to another. This was a disadvantage to her, when she was so hurried that she could not withdraw herself from household cares to wait upon the word of life. It is an advantage to her now, that she can, with comparative ease, shake off her depression, and hasten of her own accord to meet her Lord. The same profound feeling, again, which made Mary the more attentive listener before, makes her the more helpless sufferer now; and disposes her almost to nurse her grief, until Jesus, her best comforter, sends specially and emphatically to rouse her. Nor is it an insignificant circumstance, that it is the ever-active Martha who carries to her more downcast sister the awakening message;—so ought sisters in Christ to minister to one another, and so may the very difference of their characters make them mutually the more helpful to one another: "She went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying,

The Master is come, and calleth for thee" (ver. 28).

When the two sisters meet Jesus, the difference between them is equally characteristic.

Martha's grief is not so overwhelming as to prevent her utterance. She is calm, and cool, and collected enough to enter into argument. She can give expression to her convictions and her hopes. She can tell that her faith is not shaken even by so severe a disappointment. Having hinted what might seem to imply a doubt,—"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (ver. 21),—she is in haste to explain her meaning, and to give assurance of her undiminished confidence: "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee" (ver. 22). And then, as the conversation goes on, she is sufficiently self-possessed to listen to a short argument on the resurrection, and to reason with the Lord upon the subject. She invites and welcomes religious discourse, and makes a formal declaration of her faith in Jesus as the author of eternal life: "Yea, Lord, I believe

that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (ver. 23-27).

Not so her sister Mary. She indeed, when at last she is emboldened by her Master's kind message, goes forth to meet him; and her reverence, her devotion, her faith, are not less than those of Martha. But her heart is too full for many words. Her emotions, when she sees the Lord, she cannot utter; the passion of her soul she cannot command. She can but cast herself down, weeping, before him, and cry, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." She adds not a word more,—she lies prostrate and silent at his feet (ver. 32).

Shall we notice one other distinctive mark of character, exquisitely delicate and true to nature? Jesus having asked where Lazarus had been laid, is conducted to the tomb, which was "a cave, with a stone upon it." He gives orders to take away the stone. "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days" (ver. 39). It is not Mary to whom it occurs to offer this objection; she is silent

still, in the unutterable agony of her grief, and the deep reverence of her soul before the Lord. But Martha's wonted officiousness makes her forward, when it might have been more becoming to be "dumb," and to "stand in awe." And the answer of Jesus might well be felt by her partly as a mild reproof;—"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?" (ver. 40.)

Such are the different aspects which sorrow wears in minds of different stamps, and of different degrees of strength and of sensibility. But if it be the sorrow of a godly heart, it finds in Jesus one who can, with the most perfect tenderness and truth, adapt his sympathy and consolation to its peculiar character, whatever that may be. It is very instructive accordingly, in this view, to observe the Lord's demeanour towards the two sisters, in his first meeting with them on this occasion, and to see how it was exactly suited to their respective tempers, and their different kinds of grief.

Martha's distress was of such a nature that it

admitted of discussion and discourse. She was disposed to converse, and to find relief in conversation. Jesus accordingly adapted his treatment to her case. He spoke to her, and led her to speak to him. He talked with her on the subject most interesting and seasonable—on the resurrection of the body and the life of the soul.

Martha had declared her unshaken trust in him as still having power to obtain from God all that he might ask (ver. 22). And a wild idea seems to have crossed her mind, that it might not even yet be too late—that the evil might, even now, be repaired. If so, it was but the fancy of a moment—the dreamy notion that sometimes haunts the desolate breast, when it strives in vain to realise the loss which it has sustained. A single sad thought brings the recollection to which, as we have seen, in her characteristic spirit of attention to such details, she afterwards adverts, that her brother has been now four days in the tomb, and corruption must be doing its horrid work upon his body. When, therefore, she hears her Lord's promise, "Thy brother shall rise again," she applies it to

his share in the general resurrection: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (ver. 23, 24). Jesus is anxious to explain himself more fully. He speaks, not of a resurrection merely, but of a resurrection in himself;—not of life only, but of life in himself: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (ver. 25, 26).

For in fact this is the only true comfort in reference to the future state. He is the only true comforter who can speak, not merely of the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body, but of himself as the life of the immortal soul and the quickener of the risen body;—"the first-begotten from the dead"—"the first-fruits of them that sleep."

Ah, what consolation is it for thee to know merely that thy brother lives and shall rise again,—that he lives now in the spirit, and that he shall rise again in the body! The consolation which I give is more effectual and complete by far. He lives in ME. He shall rise with ME.

And what is the life which I continue, even after death, to sustain? It is the very life which I impart now,—life before God,—life in God; the life of a soul pardoned, justified, reconciled to God;—renewed after the image of God, sanctified and made meet for the fellowship of God for ever. And what is the resurrection which I give? Is it not a resurrection to glory —when these "vile bodies" shall be changed and "fashioned like unto my glorious body?" It is my own life that I impart to the believer now, and continue to him without interruption beyond the grave. It is of my own resurrection that I am to make him a partaker when I come again.*

These, or such as these, are the only words which, spoken by one who has authority, can shed light on the dark tomb of a lost and buried brother,—or on the darker sorrow of a surviving sister's heart. So the apostle felt when he said, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,

* See next discourse on verses 25, 26.

even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

And what though Martha may not as yet understand fully all that is involved in the assurance, "I am the resurrection and the life?" She is relieved by having laid on her Divine Friend the burden of her soul, and imparted her sorrows and her hopes to one who can so graciously commune with her concerning the glorious end and issue of them all. It is, therefore, with somewhat of a lightened heart that she declares her entire acquiescence in his power and her perfect trust in his goodness; adopting the usual form of confession by which the disciples were wont to own their Master as the Messiah: "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

When Mary, on the other hand, draws near, in the anguish of silent woe, Jesus is differently affected, and his sympathy is shown in a different way. He is much more profoundly moved. He does not reply to her in words, for her own words are few. Sorrow has choked her utter-

ance and over-mastered her soul. But the sight of one so dear to him, lying in such helpless anguish at his feet, is an appeal to him far stronger than any supplication. And his own responsive sigh is an answer more comforting than any promise. "When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her,"—for it was a melting scene,—"he groaned in spirit, and was troubled." And when he had asked of the bystanders, "Where have ye laid him?" and received the reply, "Come and see,"—like Joseph, he could not refrain himself—"Jesus wept."

O most blessed mourner, with whose tears thy Saviour mingles his own! O sympathy most unparalleled! To each of the two stricken and afflicted ones the Lord addressed the very consolation that was most congenial. To Martha he gave exceeding great and precious assurances, in words such as never man spake. To Mary he communicated the groanings of his spirit, in language more expressive to the heart than any spoken words could be. With Martha, Jesus discoursed and reasoned. With Mary, "Jesus wept."

What a friend is this! what a brother! Yea, and far more than a brother! And how confidently may you come to him, ye Christian mourners, in every season of trial! For he will assuredly give you the very cordial, the very refreshment, which you need. He is a patient hearer, if you have anything to say to him; and he will speak to you as you are able to bear it. Your complaints, your regrets, your expostulations, your very remonstrances and upbraidings, may all be expressed to him. He will pity—he will comfort. The Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance what Christ has said suitable to your case. He will recall to you the Saviour's gracious words of eternal life, and suggest to you considerations fitted to dissipate your gloom, and put a new song in your mouth. And even if you cannot collect your thoughts, and order your words aright,—if you are "dumb with silence when your sorrow is stirred," and as "you muse, your heart is hot within you,"—oh remember, that with these very "groanings which cannot be uttered, the Spirit maketh intercession for you!" And they are not hid

from him who, when he saw Mary weeping, groaned, and was troubled, and wept.

There is, indeed, enough of all varied consolation in this blessed book, which all throughout testifies of Jesus! For the sorrow that seeks vent in words, and desires also to be soothed by words,—there is the Saviour's open ear—there are the Saviour's lips into which grace was poured. For the grief that is dumb and silent,—there are the Saviour's tears!

I have endeavoured to trace the lineaments of two very different characters; and to show how they appeared in the ordinary scenes of life, and how they manifested themselves in the chamber of sickness—in the house of mourning. On their comparative excellences and defects respectively I pronounce no judgment, further than what may be gathered incidentally from the narrative as the judgment of the Lord himself. But I may be allowed to say, in conclusion, of Mary's fervency of spirit as compared with Martha's diligence in business—This ye ought to cherish, but not to leave the other undone. There is a tendency to regard religion

as consisting chiefly in services rendered to the Lord Jesus, and attention and observance paid to him,—in ministering busily, if not to his person, yet to his cause and the affairs of his kingdom. And there is a danger, in days especially when much is to be done, of substituting a certain bustling activity and liberality and zeal in the work of the Lord, for deep and devoted piety in waiting upon his word. Never forget, then, that Mary chose the better part. What Jesus chiefly desires is to see you rather sitting at his feet than cumbered about much serving,—rather that you should ask and receive much grace from him than that you should make a merit of rendering much service to him. But beware of supposing that there is any inconsistency or incompatibility between these two habits of mind. The tempers of the two sisters may be united and blended. Be it your study and prayer that they may be so in you. Be as fervent in spirit as Mary was,—as diligent in business as Martha was. Choose the privilege of waiting upon the word of the Lord,—yet, neglect not the work of the Lord. Seize every opportunity, answer every call, of useful-

ness,—while, at the same time, you cultivate the holy taste for meditative retirement, divine fellowship, and heavenly rest;—even as he did of whom it is testified that he "went about doing good," and of whom also it is written, that he "spent the whole night in prayer to God." Then may you entertain the confident hope that in seasons of affliction yours will be the blessedness of uniting both the portions of consolation which the sisters separately received. Jesus will speak to you as he did to Martha, —Jesus will weep with you as he did with Mary.

II.

JESUS THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.—JOHN xi. 25, 26.

THE Lord here identifies himself with an event, —"the resurrection;" and a state,—"the life." The event and the state are intimately connected; the one takes its character from the other; according to what the life is, so is the resurrection. If it is life in the sense in which all men on the earth live,—if it is the life that is here and now common to all the race,—then the resurrection is a mere resuscitation. It is simply a return to this present world, under the ordinary conditions of man's present occupancy of it; such a return to life as actually took place in the case of Lazarus, and of others whom our Lord and his apostles raised from the dead. But if it is life in a higher sense that is meant —life in the favour and fellowship of God—the

resurrection must obviously be of a sort corresponding to the life.

That this last is the life meant is evident, for it is associated with faith. It is the life which those have who believe in Jesus. Of this life it is said, on the one hand, that it overcomes, or, as it were, undoes and reverses death; and, on the other hand, that it abolishes death, or renders it impossible. In the one view, the believer in Jesus may die, or be dead, yet with the certainty that he shall live. In the other view, he is never to die at all.

In either view, the life is in Jesus. He is the life. And in order to his being the life, he is the resurrection. For he was dead. But, in the first place, when he died, it might be said of him, "though he were dead, yet shall he live." There is to be for him a resurrection. And now, secondly, it may be said of him that he "liveth," and so liveth that "he shall never die." Hence he himself says, "I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (or *hades*) and of death;"—of the unseen world and of the entrance thereto (Rev. i. 18). And hence

also to those who, believing, are one with him, he is the resurrection and the life. He is their life, and in order to his being so, he is their resurrection. In a double sense he is their life; inasmuch as, first, in him, though they die, they shall yet live; and inasmuch as, secondly, living now in him, they shall never die.

Thus there are two ways of considering the Lord's saying, "I am the resurrection and the life." On the one hand, it may be considered in connection with the admission that the believer has to face death; according to the promise in the twenty-fifth verse,—"He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." On the other hand, it may be considered in the light of the assurance that to the believer there is properly no death; according to the promise in the twenty-sixth verse,—"Whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die."

Part First.

It would seem to be admitted, in the first instance, that one who believes in Jesus as the resurrection and the life, may die. "Though

he were dead," the Lord says; though he die; though he be dead.

In a literal sense, this was an admission obviously demanded by the fact that Lazarus was dead. It would have been difficult to persuade Martha that a believer in Jesus was never to die when her brother Lazarus was dead. Yes, there is death. My brother is gone. The arm that used to embrace me so tenderly, the eye that so often met mine so lovingly, the manly frame I was so apt only too proudly to admire, —all is mouldering in the dark grave. But out of that death there is life. "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

The life, therefore, which a believer has in Jesus, as the resurrection and the life, is not incompatible with death. Nay, it implies death. It is the antithesis or antagonism of death. The glory of it lies in this very concession;— "though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Nor is it merely to the death which Lazarus had just died, that this admission applies. Death, in a far deeper sense, is comprehended in it. The expression—"though he were dead"

—will cover, not merely such a death as Lazarus had died, but such a death also as Christ himself died. Nay, it must comprehend and cover that death, if he is the resurrection and the life, and if it is as one with him in that character, that he who believeth in him, though he were dead, shall yet live.

Need I say what death that was? The death which Christ had to die! The death with reference to which it might be said of him, "Though he were dead, yet shall he live!" What death was that?

A death of cruelty; a death of agony; a death of shame! More than that. A death of condemnation; a death of wrath; a penal death; "the cursed death of the cross!" He was to die, bearing the guilt, and suffering the punishment of sin; exhausting the sentence of the violated law. That was the bitterness of his death. Thus he was appointed to die. Thus he actually died.

But though he was thus to die, yet he was to live. Even before he gave up the ghost, he was to be in a position to say, "It is finished;" "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

And on the third day thereafter he was to be "declared to be the Son of God, with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. i. 4).

Jesus then might truly say of himself, Though I were dead, yet shall I live. And it is because he can say this of himself, that he can say also of every one who believes in him, Though he were dead yet shall he live. He may have to die, not merely as Lazarus has died, but as I am to die. He may have to be a partaker, not in the first place at least, with Lazarus in his death, but before that, with me in mine. Nay, it must be so, if he believes in me.

For, if we believe, we must enter into Christ's death, and make it our own. There must be realised in our experience an actual personal dying with Christ. There must be wrought in us by the Holy Spirit some real apprehension of a dealing with us for our sins on the part of God, the righteous Judge, exactly similar to his dealing with Christ, when he bore our sins in his own body on the cross.

It may be a dealing thoroughly fatal, for the time, to our peace; remorselessly destructive of

any life we may once have thought we had,—any life we may once have hoped to make good,—before our God. There may be darkness above and all around, a rending of the rocky heart within, a sharp sword of wrath piercing us, a heavy sense of guilt oppressing us; and the cry, as of one forsaken of God, may be wrung from each of us apart,—"Woe is me! for I am undone." Still let us not shrink from the hour; let us accept the punishment of our sin; let God smite us even to the dust, till all idea of our having any life of our own is gone, and we fall at his feet as dead. Only let us believe in Jesus; embrace him as dying for us; consent to be dead in him. And let us lay hold of that assurance of his, concerning every one who believeth in him;—"Though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Yes! In spite of this death we live. Nay, more. Through this death we live. For now, believing, we are accounted one, because we are really one, with Christ in his death. His death is reckoned to be ours; in the eye of the law, it is equivalent to ours. Because Christ is dead, the law regards us as dead. Christ, in

his death, has endured and exhausted the penalty of the law; and we who are one with him, have endured and exhausted it in him. Its condemning sentence has no more hold over him; nor over us who are in him.

Such is the efficacy of his death; such its legal force and import. And such is the virtue of that real and vital union which the Spirit, by working faith in us, effects between Christ and us. We die with Christ; we die in Christ. Now, "he that is dead is freed from sin" (Rom. vi. 7); from sin's curse or condemnation by the law. The law has done its worst. That penal death being over,—first as regards Christ,—and then as regards us who are in Christ,—he lives, and we live along with him.

So our Lord here teaches. And so also, with greater fulness, his fully instructed Apostle Paul testifies; "If we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto

sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 8-11).

Is there yet awaiting us another death? Believing in Jesus, and being partakers with him in the death which he died, have we still, even after that, to be partakers of the death which Lazarus died?

Be it so. But is not the Lord's assurance as applicable to this death in prospect, as to the death that is past?

Nay, it is so much more. For this death before us is less formidable by far than the death from which we are already delivered. It need not have in it, and should not have in it; if we really believe, it cannot have in it; —those elements of guilt and wrath that filled the cup which our Saviour had to drink, and which we drink with him when we are "crucified with him." The experience of our dying hour is not to be like that which smites us when, under a sense of sin's guilt and the law's curse, we die now. The Spirit,—causing us to enter into the death of Christ now by giving us an insight into his cross,—slays us once for all; empties us of all conceit of life; makes us own

and feel ourselves to be dead. But that death we survive; from that death we are raised. Though thus dead, we live. What remains is not death;—it is a falling asleep in Jesus.

When that hour comes to thee, believer, the Spirit, bringing to thy remembrance what Christ hath said, will cause thee to hear these gracious words, "I am the resurrection and the life." Thou seest the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. It is as raised from the dead that he stands there; and thou too art raised from the dead in him. Dying as thou art, "thy life is hid with Christ in God." Thy life is bound up in the life of thy risen Lord. He, as the resurrection and the life, has already brought thee through a worse death than thou hast to die now. He will bring thee through this death also. He will bring thee through it completely,—in respect of thy body as well as thy soul. Though thou hast to die, yet shalt thou live.

Ah, then, thy end may well be peace! Yes. Though it be even amid a shower of stones that thou art perishing, the tumult of angry passions raging all around; gazing still on thy risen

Saviour thou shalt say, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" And breathing the prayer of charity, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," quietly, in the arms of thy risen Lord, thou shalt "fall asleep."

This first view of the Lord's gracious assurance may suggest some practical thoughts.

1. In how emphatic a sense is that saying true, "He that loveth his life shall lose it" (John xii. 25). The Lord says this with reference to his own dark death, viewed as the condition of his life and glory;—"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (ver. 24).

And yet the love of life is inherent in man. All men cleave to life. Nor is it merely to the natural life which finds its congenial home in this warm-breathing world that men cling. To life in a higher sense they cling; to the idea of some spiritual life which they may have, as being at all events not utterly and hopelessly condemned in the judgment of God. It is of that life chiefly that the Lord speaks when he says, "He that loveth his life shall lose it."

Are you in this sense "loving your life?" Are you clinging to the imagination of your not being, after all, so very guilty, so very destitute of all title to favour with God, as his whole word proclaims you to be? Are you still going about to establish a righteousness of your own, —striving to satisfy or silence conscience by the common pleas of worldly self-justification? I beseech you to consider that, as certainly as there is a God of judgment, so certainly must that life of yours issue ere long in the discovery that all is lost!

Before the awful throne, the books of reckoning are opened. Your sins are set out before you; yes, and your virtues too; your pieties and charities. The heartlessness of your whole way of dealing with God is exposed. And the heavy sentence of his holy law of love crushes you,—unholy and unloving,—in ruin that admits of no retrieval.

Love not a life like that. Rather now, in the day of grace, let that self-righteous life of yours be hated, disowned, renounced, finally and for ever. Let it go; you are well rid of it. For "he that," in this sense, "hateth his life

in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (ver. 25).

2. "The corn of wheat falls into the ground and dies." And he carries you with him. You are in him as he lies in the grave; crucified with him; buried with him. That old life of yours, with all its sins and all its righteousnesses, is buried with him; never again to come up, either to tempt you again to trust in it, or to torment you with any feeling of its condemnation. There, in the grave of that crucified one, you lie buried, as to all your guilt, and all your liability to wrath and judgment. Surely it is a blessed thing thus to die.

3. It is so, because the life that issues out of this death is very blessed indeed. "The corn of wheat," when it dies, "bringeth forth much fruit." You, believing, are among the "much fruit;"—being raised from the death of guilt and condemnation to a life of acceptance and peace. You live now, in and with Christ. His life,—his risen life,—is yours; as truly as your death,—your penal death,—was his. You are in the same position in which you would be, if you had yourselves personally died the very

death which Christ died when he fully expiated guilt; and had thereafter risen again as he rose; —experiencing the very resurrection by which he was "declared to be the Son of God with power."

How complete, then, is your deliverance from the fear of death, and the bondage in which the fear of death keeps you. How strong also is the obligation under which you lie, as "dead with Christ," "to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts;" and as "risen with Christ," to "seek the things which are above, where he sitteth at the right hand of God." For thus you realise your fellowship with him, first in his death, and then in his resurrection and life as consequent upon his death. He is thus, through his death and your participation in his death by faith, "the resurrection and the life" to you. Thus, "though you die, yet you live."

And though you have another death still before you, it is not that "second death" which awaits the ungodly. Your second death is your quietly falling asleep in Jesus. That once over, you are alive in him for evermore. You are at home with him immediately in your emancipated spirits.

And ere long, in your glorified bodies also, you are to be for ever at home with him, according to his own blessed parting promise to his disciples; "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3).

Part Second.

While in one view it is admitted that "he that believeth in Jesus as the resurrection and the life" may die, when it is said, "though he were dead, yet shall he live;" in another view the opposite seems to be implied, when it is added, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And that is emphatically true.

The life which you have through believing in Jesus as "the resurrection and the life" is unbroken and continuous. It admits of stages of progress and advancement, but not of interruption. From its first commencement onward

through eternal ages, it stretches its unsevered line, its uncut thread. And it is one and the same life throughout. It is life in Christ; and in Christ considered as "the resurrection and the life."

It is a state, reached through an event; a state of life, reached through the event of a resurrection. The event is identified with Christ, "I am the resurrection;" and so also is the state, "I am the life." When you believe in him, the event and the state become yours as well as his;—yours in the very sense in which they are his. Being one with him as "the resurrection," you become one with him "as the life." That is the law or condition of the life which knows no death. And it is so in reference to all its stages of development; initial here; and hereafter—first intermediate, and then final.

I. Take this new life in its initial stage of development, as it begins and makes progress in this world. It is a state reached through an event. It is life springing out of a resurrection from death. And the resurrection, as originating the life, Christ identifies with himself

personally ;—" I am the resurrection and the life."

The expression is figurative ;—but, viewed in the light of the occasion, it is not obscure.

Martha has been looking to the future, probably the remote future, thinking of some far distant day when she may embrace her brother in the flesh again. Jesus recalls her to the present. The resurrection to which you thought I was referring when I said, " Thy brother shall rise again," may, in one view of it, be far off. But in another view, it is near. It is here. It is here in me ; in my person. For it is a resurrection which must first be realised in me personally, in order that it may then be realised also in him who, through grace, believes in me.

How is this resurrection realised in the person of Christ himself ? As realised in his person, what is involved in it ?

Guided by the fuller teaching of the apostles on this subject, and especially of the Apostle Paul, we may partly trace the meaning of that great transaction.

Writing to the Ephesians (ii. 5, 6), he represents believers as, in the first place, " quickened

with Christ;" in the second place, "raised up together with Christ;" and in the third place, "made to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places." He thus identifies their position with that of Christ himself (i. 19, 20), when "God raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."

Now the position of Christ, as thus raised, has in it the three elements of power, grace, and glory;—power, reversing the sentence of death; grace, conveying a sentence of life; and glory, crowning the conqueror with meet reward.

In the first place, in his resurrection, Christ is fully and finally delivered from death;—from the death he consented to die when he "gave his life a ransom for many." Resurrection is to him the removal or reversal of the divine sentence under which he suffered; the proof that, with reference to him, that sentence is exhausted. He ceases to lie under any of the penal consequences of that guilt of ours which was imputed to him when he died. In so far as these consequences affected his soul, he was rid of them.

when he cried, "It is finished." But that was not enough. So long as they continued to touch his body, so long as the penal death he died had hold of him by any part of his human nature,—he was still really bearing somewhat of the doom of sin, as one condemned. But there was no more condemnation when he rose from the dead.

In the second place, in his resurrection, Christ not only ceases to be dead, or to lie under the sentence of death; he begins to live anew; he receives the sentence of life. Not only is he absolved from the condemnation that was upon him, as "made a curse" for us; he is judicially acquitted; accepted as righteous; in a word, justified. And the justification is complete. For he has brought in an everlasting righteousness; he has rendered a perfect obedience. He has not only endured and exhausted the penalty of the violated law; he has done more than that. Made under the law, he has honoured it by his holy, spotless, sinless compliance with its demands, both positive and punitive or penal. As the Father's righteous servant he has done the Father's will. And

his resurrection is the Father's significant approval of him, in that character, and on that account.

Thirdly, in his resurrection, Christ is set at the right hand of the Father. His seat now, as the risen Saviour,—his home,—is in "the heavenly places," beside the Father. That is his life, following from his resurrection. It is the life upon which, being man as well as God, he enters,—when he passes from the cross and the grave into "the heavenly places."

How he there dwells with the Father; how his human soul is filled with overflowing communications of the Father's love; how, as to his human nature as well as his divine, he is with the Father, being "daily his delight, rejoicing always before him;" how his affections are ravished there; what are his activities there; tongue cannot tell nor heart conceive. Enough to know that our risen Lord is at home with the Father in "the heavenly places!"

Such is the resurrection, as realised in the person of Christ, and such the life which it originates.

Now it is this very resurrection that Christ

becomes to us, and this very life, when we believe in him. Resurrection, as realised in us, is identical with what it is, as realised in him. First, we are "quickened together with Christ." Secondly, we are "raised up together" with him. And, thirdly, we are made to "sit with him in the heavenly places" (Eph. ii. 5, 6). Thus his resurrection, and consequently his life, become ours.

All this implies a work of power. It is the exercise of "the exceeding greatness of the power of God, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. i. 19, 20). It is power, however, exercised in a peculiar manner. It is omnipotence; but it is omnipotence working in terms of law; and that law, the moral law; the law of love and duty, which can neither be forced nor evaded, but must be honoured and obeyed.

Look again at the Lord Jesus in his death. See him as his body lies in the tomb. What obstacles stand in the way of his resurrection?

Some obstacles there are, which a mere and

simple exertion of divine power may remove. The stone can thus be rolled away from the mouth of the sepulchre; and the breath of life can thus be made to reanimate the clay-cold corpse. There might thus be a resurrection effected by the mere fiat of omnipotence. The Father speaks and it is done:—"Let that grave be opened;—let the principle of vitality again possess that body;—let the disembodied spirit return to it." There is a resurrection thus effected. The dead Christ no doubt is raised.

But he is raised only to be what he was before. He is raised to resume his old life in the flesh,—under the old terms and conditions; the old obligations, responsibilities, and liabilities. He is raised to be again "made under the law;" —under its authority, and under its curse. A resurrection, in the case of Christ, effected by a mere act of power, might have done that; it could have done no more than that. It could not have brought him into a position in which he might be "the resurrection and the life" to us. It would have been merely and simply a return to the old life; not a resurrection to a new life.

His resurrection, if it is to be available as a source of life to us, must be a judicial act, as well as a work of power. Omnipotence effects it; but I repeat, it is omnipotence acting according to law. It is the Almighty One speaking, and it is done. But it is at the same time the Righteous One saying—It is enough; the judgment is over; the punishment has been borne. The surety, when he is raised and revived, rises and lives upon a new footing. And on that new footing he is in a position to be "the resurrection and the life" to us, when we believe in him as thus risen and thus living.

There is therefore a twofold divine interposition in that event of our history,—that crisis in our experience,—that change in our spiritual state,—which is implied in Christ being "the resurrection and the life" to us; or, in other words, in our being "raised with him to newness of life" (Rom. vi. 4).

First, there is a work of power; an operation of the Almighty Spirit. The sealed stone at the mouth of Christ's sepulchre, the perfect deadness of his bodily frame, its utter incapacity

for originating life or motion;—these are but faint types of the obstacles, external and internal, which have to be dealt with and overcome, before one who is dead in sin can rise and live. The immediate and direct touch of omnipotence, and that alone, can meet the case. To roll away the stone,—the hard and heavy stone,—of careless unconcern and carnal security, with which the world, and the world's prince, contrive to close the way of access into the heart and conscience; and then, to impart vitality, so that the smitten conscience may mourn and the broken heart give forth its tears;—that is the Spirit's work of power.

But, secondly, the Spirit works in harmony with that judicial resurrection-act apart from which even a real spiritual resurrection would be in vain. For of what avail would it be to have fresh vitality imparted to the soul; to have the conscience and the heart quickened into new sensibility, as regards the claims of God and the guilt of sin; if it were to issue merely in our being put again where we were before,—and set again to the old task of working out a righteousness or resurrection,

and a life or justification, for ourselves? Quickened thus in conscience and in heart,—with conscience keenly sensitive and heart affectionate and warm,—we would only aim the higher in our attempt to satisfy God's law of love,—and sink the deeper under a bitter sense of failure and defeat,—of condemnation and of wrath?

To recall Christ again, by a resurrection of mere power, to the state in which he was before he died,—to place him again under law as he was then,—to impose upon him a second time the obligations and responsibilities which he had already so fully met,—this would have appeared, in the eyes of all intelligences, intolerable severity. And yet he could have stood the ordeal! He could have passed again unscathed through the furnace heated seven times! But for us to be spiritually quickened in heart and soul and conscience,—and at the same time left in the state in which we are by nature, as regards our relation to God and our standing in his sight,—to be put, as it were, again upon our probation,—to have simply another opportunity given to us of trying how

we may right ourselves with God,—and that, too, with an altogether new sense of holiness and of sin;—such procedure on the part of God towards us would be a sort of mockery. It would be as if God had given Adam a second chance in the garden of Eden; as if, reinstating him there, with the knowledge he had got of good and evil,—of unattainable good and inevitable evil,—God had simply proposed to him, as if in irony, a repetition of the experiment of the forbidden tree.

That, however, is not the manner of God. When Christ is raised, there is a work of power; rolling away the stone and causing the buried body again to breathe. But along with that, there is a judicial act; removing the condemnation and passing a sentence of acquittal and acceptance;—admitting him who had died a criminal to a prince's seat on the king's throne, and a son's place in the Father's heart.

Even so, when Christ is "made of God to us" "the resurrection and the life," there is a work of power. The door of our heart, which is a very sepulchre,—whited, perhaps, but still a sepulchre,—is broken open;—often violently,

with much force of awakening and conviction, a sort of earthquake shaking us with great terror;—sometimes, however, more gently, as if an angel's hand were touching the stone very tenderly. The dead bones within are stirred to life. The Spirit breathes on them. Stupid, carnal unconcern gives place to earnest, anxious, inquiring sensibility.

Thus far there is a work of power;—issuing in the cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

But is that enough? Is that all?

No. Along with that there is and must be a judicial act. We hear the call, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." We hear; and hearing, through grace we believe.

And now, first of all, we are delivered from death; for "there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Nay, more; in the second place, we are judicially acquitted and accounted righteous; we are raised to life as "accepted in the beloved." Nay, more still; in the third place, we are made to "sit with him," as adopted children, partakers of his filial rank and filial nature, "in the heavenly places."

We have a life, whose seat and centre and home is the bosom of the Everlasting Father, where the Son himself dwells for evermore.

Thus, with reference to our experience in this world, Christ is to us "the resurrection and the life." Through union and participation with him in his resurrection, we come to have union and participation with him in his life. Believing in him, we live; absolved, justified, adopted.

And we so live in him that we shall never die. Such a life, thus reached by such a resurrection, has no liability to death in it or about it,—no possibility of death. It is not, and cannot be, subject to death, or the risk of death. From its very nature and origin, it is unbroken in its continuity. When once begun, it must go on uninterruptedly. The work of divine power,—and the judicial act, or sentence of divine law,—concurring in the resurrection which originates the life, secure its continuing for ever; and its continuing for ever, always the same. "Living and believing in Jesus, we never die."

II. But our life, realised through faith in Jesus as "the resurrection and the life,"—our

life in the risen Saviour,—has its eras. It has its eras even here in this world; its dates or times of progress and advancement. And in reference to the world to come, it has at all events these two;—death and the resurrection.

Death, in this view, is not really death; it is a step in the march of that life which knows no death. It is, in fact, our second resurrection. When we fall asleep in Christ, he is even then to us "the resurrection and the life." He is so, in a new sense, and to a new effect. For he then severs completely the ties that bind us to the past and present here, and throws us wholly on the future elsewhere.

In our conversion,—when we believe in Christ now and here,—he is to us "the resurrection and the life." Spiritually, as believers, we rise from the death of guilt and apostasy, and pass with him into "the heavenly places." And there we "sit with him at the right hand of God." This we realise by faith;—often by an effort of faith by no means easy. Our aspirations after the resurrection-life now,—our endeavours to enter into it and carry it out,—are hindered by our present worldly condition

and our present bodily frame. Both are unfavourable to its development. The world is adverse, and the world's prince. And "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit."

At death, these obstacles are taken out of the way. The world is left behind, and the prince of the world. The flesh is cast off. Emancipated from all earthly bonds, disencumbered of all fleshly desires, we depart to be with Christ. Absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. Is it not a step in advance? It is virtually our entering, through a new resurrection, into a new life. The new resurrection is the escape which the soul, perfected in holiness, makes from the world and the body;—from the world lying in wickedness, and from the "vile body" that is corrupting and corruptible. The new life is the rapturous communion with the risen Saviour which the soul, thus delivered, may enjoy. No outward object distracts; no burden of flesh depresses. Away from the world of sense, abstracted from things external, —all carnal tastes and tendencies cast off,—I am at home with Christ in God. And it is with Christ as risen, that I am at home in God;

—in his favour, his fellowship, and his love. Leaving this earth, and the body which is mouldering in its dust,—with no thought of either any more,—I pass into the august presence in which my risen Lord has his abode. And I am one with him there. My disenthralled and disencumbered spirit is one with him there; —one with him in the life which in his human nature he reached when, on the very day of the crucifixion, he himself,—carrying the spirit of the dying penitent along with him,—passed into paradise.

Is he not then to me—is he not then pre-eminently, "the resurrection and the life?" My death, thus viewed, is no interruption of my resurrection-life, but the lifting of it up, as by a new resurrection, to a higher stage and platform, on which it may be realised and unfolded more fully than it can be now. Surely, I might be inclined to say, this is the consummation of the blessedness to which I may aspire, as "living and believing in Christ."

Nay; it is not, it cannot be. For this unearthly and incorporeal life has its drawbacks. It is an advance on what goes before undoubtedly.

But the very circumstances in respect of which it is so, constitute its imperfection. In the step taken at death, the external world and the material body are cast off; and the soul emerges, bare and naked, to find its home with Christ in God. This, I repeat again, is a step in advance; it may be said to be a second resurrection. Here, on the earth, when Christ becomes to us "the resurrection and the life," the utmost we can look for, as regards the world and the flesh, is that we may be in a position, and may have power, to overcome the world and mortify the flesh. At death we cease to have any connection with a world needing to be overcome, and with flesh needing to be mortified. It is a great and blessed emancipation.

And yet there may be a more excellent way. Absence from the world and the flesh,—exemption from what is here the needful task of overcoming the world and mortifying the flesh,—is not the perfection of our being. It is not the perfection of Christ's. If there can be a world that does not require to be overcome, and flesh that does not require to be mortified; if we can resume our worldly condition and our bodily

frame, not only without the necessity of constant war against them in the spirit, but with the certainty of their ministering to our holiness and joy;—if we can return to this earth, or such an earth as this, renewed and purified, and return to it with bodies incorruptible, spiritual, and immortal;—is not this a higher hope than the other? And is not this our full and final hope in him who, as "the resurrection and the life," calls us, in and with himself, to "inherit all things"?

He has himself a glorified body; he is coming to possess a renovated earth. We are to "bear the image of the heavenly,"—of "the second Adam, the Lord from heaven." We are to reign with him, sharing his throne and crown. Our life, begun now in him as made of God to us "the resurrection and the life," is to have its perfection of holiness and happiness then; for "when he who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory" (Col. iii. 4).

Several important lessons of a practical nature may be drawn from the views now submitted.

I. As originally uttered, in his conversation with Martha, this statement of the Lord was fitted, and probably intended, to throw light on what, to believers under the Old Testament dispensation, seems to have been a dark object of contemplation—the intermediate state between death and the resurrection.

Of the resurrection itself they had a firm persuasion and bright prospect. It was "the hope of Israel;" "the hope of the promise made of God unto the Fathers." Their views as to the nature of that world into which the resurrection was to usher them, may have been inadequate, and more or less carnal. But when it is testified of them that they "walked as strangers and pilgrims in the earth, declaring plainly that they sought a country," "a better country," "a heavenly country,"—it is undeniable that they looked for an inheritance to be reached by a resurrection.

A cloud, however, as it would appear, hung over the blank space in front of that event. It was felt to be a dreary void;—that vast unseen region in space, that blank interval in time, wherein flesh and blood are not.

1. The beginning of this life, in our experience, is and must be a resurrection—a resurrection, in our case, corresponding to the resurrection that there was in the case of Christ. In order to this, as we have seen, two dealings of God must concur and conspire; a work of power, restoring the vital principle, and a judicial act, placing us, with our restored vitality, on a right footing with God, the righteous judge. Regeneration, in short, and justification, meet in this resurrection; and the two together are essential to its completeness. There must be a new birth, a new creation, effected by divine omnipotence. And along with that, and coincident with it, there must be the cancelling of the sentence of condemnation against us, and the passing in our favour of a sentence of acquittal and acceptance. It is thus that we are risen with Christ, quickened with him, justified in him.

2. As it is a resurrection-life in its commencement, so it is a resurrection-life throughout;—now in this present world; after death in the world of spirits; and after the resurrection, through all eternity, in "the new heavens and

the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

How completely does this consideration identify the life that now is and the life that is to come! They are no more twain, but "one spirit." It is throughout one spirit that is the breath of this life;—the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. It is the one Holy Spirit;—making us, in successive stages, more and more partakers of the resurrection-life of Christ.

Ah! how calm and holy is this progressive life! It knows no violent breaks. Even death and the resurrection are not interruptions of it. Its changeless stream flows ever equably on. Through the portals of the tomb it enters a purer, but a narrower, channel. At the opening of the doors for the King of Glory at the last, it issues forth,—a broad river of joy and love,—rolling its ceaseless tide among the islands of the blessed for ever. From the first, throughout, its essential character is the same. It has the same taste, the same colour, the same tendency. The life which we now live in the flesh, is the same as the life which we are to live when we depart to be with Christ. It is the same, as to

all that constitutes its real nature, with the life which we are to live after the Lord has come to "change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body," and to say "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

III. For, finally, all throughout the life is Christ. He is "the resurrection and the life." He is so now; "to me to live is Christ." He is so at death; "I depart to be with Christ," "absent from the body I am present with the Lord." He is so at the resurrection; I shall then "bear the image of the heavenly." So Christ teaches us here. I am now; I shall be when I take you hence; I shall be still more when I return hither, bringing you with me again;—I am always, evermore, "the resurrection and the life." All is in me and of me; for I am all in all; the alpha and the omega; the first and the last; the living one; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever!

Is not this your consolation, O believers? Is not this your hope? When your tears flow fresh for your loved and lost ones, you think of

them as they are now, far away from you ;—and for that you mourn. But you think of them as being with Christ ;—and so you are comforted for them. When, again and again, the thought of their separation from you rushes back to afflict you, you think of them as coming with Christ to meet you ;—and so you are comforted for yourselves. It is their being with Christ that comforts you for them ;—it is their coming with Christ that comforts you for yourselves. And when your own dissolution is present to your mind, and the eternal state is in solemn prospect before you ; on what do you fasten as your hope ? Is it not on the assurance that when you leave the body you go to Christ, —and that when you resume the body again it is to be with him where he is :—to "behold his glory, the glory which the Father hath given him," for "the love with which he loved him before the world was" ?

III.

The Hope of the Resurrection — The Trial of Abraham's Faith (Gen. xxii.)

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac.—Hebrews xi. 17-19.

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?—James ii. 21-23.

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad.—John viii. 56.

The temptation of our Lord in the wilderness occurred immediately after his being declared to be the Son of God by the voice from heaven at his baptism (Matt. iii. 17). And all throughout, the temptation turns upon the privilege and prerogative which his being the Son of God implies. The tempter would fain persuade him to stand upon his right, as the Son of God,—to avail himself of the power belonging to him, in that character, for his own relief and his own aggrandisement,—and to snatch the inheritance to which he is entitled, as the Son whom God hath appointed heir of all things, without wait-

ing the Father's time and fulfilling the Father's terms.

It is not Satan, but God, who "tempts Abraham," or puts him to the proof. So far there is a difference between the patriarch and the Saviour. The trial of the one is gracious and paternal; the other has to stand a more fiery ordeal. Abraham has to listen to God, and obey; Jesus has to encounter Satan, and resist.

In other respects, however, there is a remarkable analogy between the two events. The father of Isaac is tried concerning his son, at the very time when that son has been emphatically owned from above as the heir. The Son of God is tempted upon the precise point of his sonship, just when it has been most signally and unequivocally acknowledged by the voice from heaven. Jesus is solicited to grasp impatiently the inheritance of his birthright, without passing through the preliminary stage of his deep humiliation and painful death. Abraham, again, is expected to acquiesce patiently in the putting off of the promises, even though the sacrifice of his beloved child, and the dark-

ness of that child's tomb, be brought in between his hope and its fulfilment. In the one case, the question is,—Will the Lord Jesus anticipate prematurely the immunities and glories of the heritage ultimately designed for him? In the other case, the question is,—Will Abraham, on the part of his son, and as bound up with his son, consent to their being indefinitely postponed?

In this connection, the trial of the patriarch's faith may be viewed in two lights, as bringing out, first, the general principle of his faith, and, secondly, its more specific character and reward.

I. Let the general principle of Abraham's faith, as here exercised, be considered.

If we look at the bare fact of a father offering up his son in sacrifice, we can see little to distinguish the conduct of the patriarch from that of too many unhappy men who, in the dismal infatuation of superstitious fear, have "given their first-born for their transgressions —the fruit of their body for the sin of their souls." We search in vain in such a work of delusion for real faith;—that meek and holy

trust which alone can be either honourable to God, or saving in its influence on the soul of man. A faith indeed of a certain kind we may discover—a faith in the existence and the power of God—a faith also in the terror of his unknown judgment. But it is such a faith as the devils have, who "believe and tremble." We discover no sense of the divine love, no enlightened and manly confidence, in the severe and gloomy resolution of such a worshipper. All in his soul must be doubt and darkness; doubt inexplicable, darkness impenetrable. And in the horrid deed of blood at which we shudder,—by which the frantic parent would appease the wrath of an inexorable and implacable Deity,—we see no hopeful reliance on an unseen benefactor, but only abject and servile fear, grasping at a lie! We must look, therefore, beyond the naked fact that "Abraham offered up Isaac," if we would rightly understand his faith.

Let us look, accordingly, to the occasion of the deed;—"Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." He made this sacrifice of parental affection at the express command of God, and sought, perhaps, to conciliate the

favour of God, not indeed by the costliness of his offering, but by his ready and implicit submission to the divine will. Perhaps that may be a full account of Abraham's views and feelings in this act, as well as of the motives from which he acted. So far it may be so. He certainly did well to submit to the declared will of his Creator, however mysterious that will might be. We see in such obedience plain evidence of faith; and of faith more enlightened in its nature than what we formerly observed in this sacrifice;—faith in the righteous authority and moral government of God, who commands, and requires obedience to his commandments, however inexplicable they may be. But we do not see faith confiding, clinging, loving; for we might conceive of the heart of the forlorn parent inwardly rebelling, while his trembling and reluctant hand was stretched out to execute the stern decree. Again, therefore, we must take into account some other circumstances of the case, if we would truly estimate either the intense severity of Abraham's trial, or the unconquerable energy of his faith.

It was "he that had received the promises"

who did all this. In full and faithful reliance on these promises, while as yet he was childless, Abraham left the land of his fathers, and "went out, not knowing whither he went." By faith in these promises, he sojourned as a stranger in the land which his descendants were to possess. On the birth of Hagar's son, despairing of any other child, he cries, "O that Ishmael might live before thee!" But when the long-expected heir is born at last, God, renewing the promises, expressly confines them to Isaac:—"In Isaac shall thy seed be called." And as if to cut off all room for doubt, Ishmael is expelled altogether from the patriarch's house. All his hope now is centred exclusively in Isaac. Thus the promises which Abraham had received were all closely and necessarily bound up in the life of Isaac. And it was that "only begotten son" —in whom "his seed was to be called"—on whom the promises depended—that, nevertheless, by faith in these very promises, he was ready at the command of God to offer up!

In the light of all these past proceedings on the part of God, we can now better understand the trial and the faith of Abraham, as they are

recorded with such affecting simplicity ;—"And it came to pass that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest. And get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering" (ver. 1, 2).

Was this, then, to be the end of all the patriarch's hopes?—this the fate of that son—the heir of so many promises, the child of such persevering faith, the destined father of a mighty people—in whom all the families of the earth were to be blessed? Was it thus that the old man, who had given up to God his youth, his friends, his home, his country, was to give up even Isaac, the child of his old age, the son of his love and his tears, his last and only stay?—to give him up, too, to the God in the fond faith of whose promises he had already sacrificed so much, and sacrificed all so vainly? Were all his long-cherished expectations to be thus cruelly mocked, at the very time when they seemed to be at last realised?

Yet we read of no hesitation—no natural regret—no murmur—no thought even of remonstrance. The patriarch did not delay or

deliberate an instant. He rose up early in the morning, and took Isaac his son, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then, leaving his attendants behind, and going on with Isaac alone, he "built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood." And these arrangements being deliberately made, "Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (ver. 3-10).

Here let us pause to contemplate the patriarch at this tremendous moment. Let us observe the conflict between sense and faith.

In the eye of sense, he was by one rash act casting recklessly away the tardy fruit of a long life of obedience, and sternly sacrificing on the altar of his God the very hope which that God had taught him to cherish. Visions of grace and glory which had fed his soul during the years of his weary exile were fast vanishing from his view, and his high prospects were by his own hand now dashed for ever to the ground. Henceforth he was to linger out his days, childless and hopeless; his faith turned into despair, his joy into heaviness; since, in the

excess of his self-denying devotion, he was obeying God, and yet, by the very act of obedience, putting utterly beyond his reach all the blessing which he had been so fully warranted by God himself to expect.

But, in the eye of faith, the venerable patriarch was still, even in this hour of terror, looking up to God, and reposing with unshaken confidence on that goodness which, during a long and harassed life, had never deceived or forsaken him. The same humble and holy trust in God, as his benefactor and his friend, which had thus far led him in safety, still triumphed over every doubt. Harsh as the decree might appear, he knew by much experience that God had never yet commanded him to his hurt; and he felt that the faithfulness of God must be as secure in the time to come as he had ever found it in time past. The cloud, indeed, might be dark which veiled the divine proceedings from his view; but it was not so dark as to cast a single shadow over his heart. He still trusted in the Lord as implicitly as when first he abandoned his father's house, casting himself on the Lord's protection. It mattered not to

Abraham that by sacrificing his only son, he was, to all appearance, sacrificing his hope of a future people and a future Saviour to spring from him through that son. It mattered not that what God commanded seemed altogether inconsistent with what God had promised; and that, according to human judgment, by obeying the command, he was making utterly void the promise. He presumed not to question the wisdom or truth of God. He simply confided in his faithfulness and love; being well assured that God would reconcile all difficulties in the end, and justify his own ways, and accomplish his own word.

Thus, "against hope he believed in hope." The language of his obedience was the language of Job: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Such was the spirit in which Abraham, on this occasion, unreservedly obeyed God; such the principle of that faith by which he was rendered willing to offer up Isaac. He did not offer up Isaac in order that by so costly a sacrifice he might purchase or propitiate the love of God; nor in order that by so signal an

instance of obedience to the divine will he might merit the divine favour. He had already received from God "exceeding great and precious promises" which, from the first, he implicitly believed, and which, from the first, warranted him in placing full reliance on the love of God as already his. He did not seek to make out, by his obedience, a claim to the favour of God; for the promises of God had already given him a claim sufficiently clear and sure. From the first and all along, his faith was altogether independent of his obedience, resting simply and solely on the promises of God; it was not the consequence but the cause, not the result but the motive, of his obedience. It was not because he obeyed God that he felt himself entitled to trust in God; but because he trusted in God, therefore he obeyed him. And his trust rested not on anything he had done, or was willing to do, but exclusively on the promises he had received. That was the faith which made him cheerfully consent to leave the land of his birth, and carried him safely through all his trials—even the present trial as by fire—not a vague, doubtful, contingent faith, timidly

venturing to deprecate wrath, and hoping, by good behaviour, to find acceptance at last; but a strong assurance of God's faithfulness, and a blessed sense of acceptance in his sight, springing out of the simple credit which he gave to the free and gracious promises made to him. Had he not had such faith in God, he never would have taken a single step in the pilgrimage of toil and trouble which God prescribed. But God promised, and Abraham believed; God commanded, and Abraham obeyed. Long before this crowning instance of his obedience, Abraham believed;—"He believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness;" —a justifying righteousness was imputed to him. It could not, at that time, be on the ground of his own obedience that he felt himself warranted to believe, but simply on the ground of the promises. And still, to the last, even after this crowning instance of his obedience, his faith was of the same simple kind; resting not on any service of his own, as if that were the condition of his peace and hope, but on the promises he had long before received, and still continued to hold fast.

Such is the explanation generally of Abraham's faith, as exemplified in the most memorable instance of its trial and its triumph. It is reliance, confidence, consent; taking God at his word; closing with his proposals; resting upon his known character and revealed will; laying hold of himself. Thus viewed, it has a double efficacy, as a bond of union and a motive of action. It unites him who exercises it to the Being upon whom he exercises it; they are one; and the oneness implies justification, reconciliation, peace. So far faith is receptive, appropriating, acquiescing. But it is an active and moving force, as well as an acquiescent uniting embrace. It not only clings closely to the stem in which it finds its inner life; it works powerfully upward and outward, bringing forth fruit. Hence, while in one view it justifies by apprehending a righteousness not its own,—in another, it justifies by verifying and vindicating itself. It justifies, as resting upon God and receiving the promises; it justifies, also, as proving itself to be genuine, by obeying the command. By faith alone Abraham was justified as a sinner before God; by faith

alone he obtained acceptance in God's sight; he believed, and therefore he was accounted righteous. But his faith wrought by works; believing the promises, he obeyed the commandment. And by this obedience, he was justified as a believer; nor without it could he have been justified in that character. By works his faith was verified and completed; and his acceptance, as the result of that faith, sealed and secured for ever. Thus we may understand the question of the apostle James—"Seest thou how his faith wrought by works, and by works was his faith made perfect?"—in harmony with what he immediately adds—"And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness" (James ii. 22, 23). That very Scripture was fulfilled when "by faith Abraham offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."

II. Let the specific character and reward of Abraham's faith be now considered. Its simplicity, viewed generally as a habit of

reliance on the promises of God, and its power as a motive of implicit obedience, are sufficiently brought out in the mere narrative itself of his trial relative to the offering up of Isaac. But we seem to obtain a deeper insight into its exercise and reward on this occasion, when we look at it in the light of allusions made to it in other parts of Scripture. In particular, both the apostle Paul (Heb. xi. 19), and our blessed Lord (John viii. 5, 6) lead us to an understanding of the precise truths which Abraham believed, more definite than a perusal of the history, without the benefit of their commentaries, might of itself suggest. They speak to the question of the What? as well as the How? It is not now merely,—How did Abraham believe? how strongly, unhesitatingly, unreservedly? but, What did Abraham believe? what facts and doctrines had such a hold over his convictions as to make him willing "against hope to believe in hope," and to slay his only son—the very son "of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called"?

One article of his creed is not obscurely indicated as having some bearing on this act of

faith. He did it,—"accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. xi. 19). What gave him courage for the offering up of Isaac was, as it would seem, his "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead."

But a question arises. Was it a return to this present life that Abraham had in his view, or a resurrection to life in the world to come? Did he contemplate the possibility of a miracle similar to that performed long after by our Lord in the case of Lazarus? Or, was he thinking of his lost child as Martha thought of her departed brother, when, in reply to the assurance of Jesus, "thy brother shall rise again," she said, so simply—"I know that he shall rise again, on the resurrection at the last day"?

It may have been upon some such event as the raising of Lazarus that Abraham reckoned. The God who commanded him, at one instant, to slay his son, was able the very next to restore him again to his arms. Abraham could not doubt that. So far, this may appear at first sight a credible and consistent enough account of his conduct.

But, on farther consideration, it will probably be felt by most men to savour somewhat of refinement; it makes the apostle's explanation of the patriarch's faith somewhat far-fetched and artificial. Such a raising of Isaac to life again, was not a natural idea to enter into the mind of Abraham. If it had, it would have been fitted to give rather an unmeaning character to the whole scene in his eyes. The intense reality of it is upon this supposition gone; and a sort of theatrical stroke, or piece of stage effect, is substituted in its stead. We have the impression that God is not acting in his usual manner, or in a way altogether worthy of himself, in thus commanding a deed to be done, on the implied understanding that he is instantly to undo it. And Abraham putting his son to death upon the faith of God being able to restore him again to life, is subjected to a physical rather than a moral trial —to the mere instinctive pain of embruing his hands in kindred blood, rather than to any exercise of the higher and more spiritual faculties or affections of his soul. Surely, when having built the altar and laid the wood in

order, and having bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood, the venerable father stretches forth his hand, and takes the knife to slay his son—it is with no expectation of ever seeing him in this world again. It is a long last look of love that he casts upon that dear face, and a fond and final farewell that he sadly whispers in that eager ear, as he nerves his hand for the fatal, the irrevocable stroke!

And then, on the other hand, the idea of a resurrection to life in a future state was as familiar to Abraham, as that of a return from death in this world must have been strange and inconceivable. Had any one sought to encourage him concerning his son, by telling him that it was not impossible for God to reanimate the mangled body, and recall the departed spirit; had some Eliphaz, or Bildad, or Zophar, been schooling him to patience by some such discourse on the divine omnipotence, and the abstract possibility of a dead man being restored to life; Abraham, like Job, might have winced under the commonplaces of his miserable comforters; but as to the notion they would insinuate into his imagination,—he must have

rejected it as a temptation, not from God, but from Satan; he must have felt it to be a fond delusion and a dream.

But it could not "be thought" by him "a thing incredible that God should raise the dead" (Acts xxvi. 8). On the contrary, that is "the very hope of the promise made of God unto the Fathers," as Paul speaks in his defence before Agrippa;—"unto which promise," he adds, "our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come" (Acts xxvi. 7). In the very passage, moreover, in which his reference to the sacrifice of Isaac occurs, he celebrates the faith of the patriarchs generally,—and especially the faith of Abraham,—as a faith which made them feel that they were strangers and pilgrims in the land, looking for a more permanent order of things beyond the tomb (Heb. xi. 9-16). And it is in immediate connection with this explanation of the hope which animated Abraham, as well as all that went before him in the heavenly race, that the apostle introduces, as a specimen and choice example of it, the incident of the offering up of Isaac.

Surely, therefore, we may conclude, on all

these grounds, that what Abraham in this instance relied on, was not generally the power of God to raise the dead, but specially his power to fulfil his promise about the resurrection, and the inheritance of the world to come. It was no vague notion of the divine omnipotence,—or of God being able to do anything, however strange,—that sustained the patriarch; but a hope far more express and unequivocal; a hope having respect unequivocally to the world to come.

Thus viewed, the trial of Abraham's faith receives a meaning not perceived before.

He had been warned, that with respect to himself personally, the promise of "the land which God was to show him" (Gen. xii. 1); —"the place which he should after receive as an inheritance" (Heb. xi. 8);—the very promise on the faith of which he left the country of his birth and the home of his fathers;—was to have its fulfilment in the resurrection state, or in the world to come. He had been told that he should "go to his fathers in peace, and be buried in a good old age," and that several generations must elapse before the land was to

be taken from its present possessors and vacated for his posterity (Gen. xv. 15, 16). Thus far he had been taught to abandon the prospect of his being himself put in possession of the promised inheritance on this side of time, and had been led to regard it as a hope for eternity. But he might still be clinging to the present—the seen and temporal—in reference to his seed. Contented to die himself before receiving the promised inheritance, he might still be dwelling on the bright future that stretched itself out before his children in the land. And now that Isaac was born, he might be willing to say, as Simeon said, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,"—not from any spiritual apprehension of eternal things, but because he could now leave behind him one who, even in a temporal point of view, might elevate his name and lineage among the families of men.

The command to offer up Isaac is the test of his faith upon this very point. Is he willing, not merely to have his own inheritance postponed till after the resurrection, but the inheritance of his seed also? Can he bear to have,

not only his own expectation, but that of Isaac, deferred to the future state?

He can; for he believes in the resurrection. He "accounts that God is able to raise him up, even from the dead." He can forego, therefore, all his fond imagination of being the founder of a family and father of a great nation in this present world. He can consent to the arrangement that after his decease there is to be no farther trace of him excepting only in the line of Ishmael that has been so unequivocally disowned. He is to die in a good old age; and it may be that he is to survive the son of whom it has been said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." After that son's decease, there may be no genuine representative of his house left behind; and to the end of time it may be matter of wonder and reproach that neither he, nor any child of his, has ever actually got possession of the inheritance, on the faith of which he went out, "not knowing whither he went." But none of these things move Abraham. He looks not to the things which are seen and temporal, but to the things which are unseen and eternal; being well assured that "if our earthly house of

this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. iv. 18; v. 1).

Great indeed, in this view, is the faith of Abraham—great almost beyond our power of sympathy or insight. And yet we may partly measure it by the universal instinct which prompts men to aim at leaving a name, or building a house, that shall survive their own removal. One of the most painful thoughts connected with death is that "the place which once knew us shall know us no more;" and one of the strongest natural desires in a parent's bosom is to live again in his children. Not a few of us can make up our minds to our own obscurity; but we yearn after distinction in the race we are to leave behind. It is often the last weakness even of a spiritual man to cherish such prospects of posthumous renown; and it is no trifling trial of his spirituality when he must submit to his not having, either in his own person, or in his posterity, a high position in the world. But if this is trying to a man having only ordinary expectations in this life, what must it have been to Abraham? No common

parent is he; nor is it any common hope that is bound up with the son for whose birth he has waited so long. The child of promise is the heir of no common birthright. A glory coextensive with the blessing of all the families of the earth is in store for his seed; a mighty nation is to hail him as their honoured sire; and the whole world is to own him as the source or channel of its regeneration.

And are the whole of these bright anticipations to stand over till time gives place to eternity? Is the patriarch, after having been taught to see glorious visions of temporal greatness and spiritual good hovering over the head of his dear child,—visions reaching to long ages and embracing the entire family of man,—not only to depart himself ere they are realised, but to have the realisation of them made impossible in the present world, and possible only in the world to come?

Then so be it. "Lord, not my will but thine be done." Abraham believes that God is able to raise the dead; and therefore he is willing to have the entire inheritance of himself and of his seed laid up in that unseen and eternal

heavenly state to which the faithful dead are to be raised. His faith in the resurrection reconciles him to the loss of all his possessions and prospects in the life that now is, and enables him to lay hold of the treasure that is in heaven.

Such, then, is the precise and specific character of Abraham's faith, as brought out in the greatest trial it had to undergo. It embraces the doctrine of the resurrection. And it embraces that doctrine with a cordial preference of the state that is beyond the resurrection over the state that is on this side of it. There is thus plain evidence in it of that transference of the affections from earth to heaven, which a divine agency alone can effect. It obtains accordingly a suitable as well as signal reward. Being made perfect by works—having its consummation in the act of obedience which it prompted—it has its appropriate and congenial recompense also in that very act itself. He "received" Isaac "from the dead in a figure" (Heb. xi. 19). He "saw the day of Christ and was glad" (John viii. 56).

In the first place, "he received Isaac from

the dead, in a figure." In the signal and seasonable deliverance of his son, he had a vivid representation of the resurrection which he had believed that God was able to effect. To all intents and purposes, Isaac had been dead, and was now alive from the dead. It was an emphatic rehearsal of the real and literal resurrection; nor could the patriarch, having been thus brought to feel the power of the world to come, ever afterwards lose the vivid sight and sense he had got of its eternal realities. Isaac has been spared to him; and, in acknowledgment of his obedient faith, the promises are renewed to him of a numerous family through Isaac, as well as of the Saviour in whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed (ver. 15-18). But the blessings thus graciously secured to him in time, must now have a peculiar meaning in his eyes, when viewed in the light of the resurrection and of eternity. For the lesson he has been taught is really this;—that the promises reach beyond this present life, and have their chief fulfilment in the life to come; that, even if he should see no fulfilment of them here, this need not surprise or

grieve him, since there is a greater and better fulfilment of them in reserve hereafter; and that any fulfilment of them he may see on earth is altogether subordinate to the fulfilment awaiting him in heaven. The birthright of which Isaac is the heir, is now seen to have its principal seat—not in this world, where all is change, and where, in a moment, the child of promise may be suddenly cut off—but in the world to come, where there is no more sorrow or separation, because there is in it no more sin.

Thus, in the second place, "Abraham saw the day of Christ" in this transaction, "and was glad." For we can scarcely doubt that it is to this transaction that the Lord refers in his controversy with the Jews on the subject of their boast of liberty, and their standing in the house or family of God (John viii. 34-59).*

It is an animated controversy. The Lord drives them back from one point of defence to another. He proves that they are the servants of sin; so that they can have no footing but that of servants in relation to God. He meets

* See Lectures on the *Fatherhood of God*, Appendix v.

their proud boast of descent from Abraham, by an appeal to their entire want of sympathy with Abraham. He meets their still prouder boast of having God as their father, by the exposure of their family-likeness, not to God, but to Satan. And at last, in answer to their challenge —"Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead?"—he announces himself as the object of Abraham's faith: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56).

Now, the day of Christ which Abraham "rejoiced"—or earnestly desired—to see, must be the day of which he himself speaks; "I must work the work of him that sent me while it is day." It is the day of his sojourn on earth; when he glorified his Father, and finished the work given him to do. More particularly, it is the day on which his work was finished, and he was himself acknowledged, accepted, and glorified by the Father; according to the prophecy of the second psalm—"Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." For "this day," as the apostle Paul expressly explains it, is the day on which God "raised up Jesus again"

(Acts xiii. 33). That is the day of Christ which Abraham desired, and was permitted, to see.

But the sight which he longed to have of it must have been something more than was ordinarily granted to the saints and patriarchs of old. They, indeed, living by faith in a Saviour yet to come, looked forward to his day, and anticipated the time when the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. But what the Lord refers to would seem to have been the peculiar privilege of Abraham; for Abraham is very specially represented as desiring to see "the day of Christ;" and as on some special occasion seeing it, and being fully gratified with the sight.

But what occasion in the history of Abraham can we fix upon more probably than the occasion now before us? And does it not give a very beautiful significancy to that most mysterious transaction, if we regard it as the appointed means of affording to Abraham that glad sight of "the day of Christ" for which he had longed and prayed? Regarded in no other light than as a trial of Abraham's faith, the narrative of

the offering up of his son Isaac is abundantly interesting and affecting. But it becomes still more so, if we look at it in the light of our blessed Lord's commentary.

Abraham had desired to see "the day of Christ;" and a sight of it, more full and distinct than believers of that time ordinarily had, is to be granted to him. He is to see in vivid reality the details of that event, of which the general outline alone was then communicated to others. For this end, he is to stand on Mount Moriah, which, as some think, is the very spot subsequently called the hill of Calvary. And he is to behold the scene of the atonement accomplished there.

He beholds it in a threefold figure. First of all, when he takes the knife, and stretches forth his hand to slay his son, he is made to realise the intensity of the love of him who spared not his own Son, but gave him up even to the death. Again, secondly, in the ram provided for Isaac's release, there is a vivid representation of the great principle of the sacrifice of Christ—the principle of substitution. A ransom is found for the doomed and con-

demned—an acceptable victim is put in their place. But, thirdly and especially, in the reception of Isaac again by Abraham virtually from the dead, and his welcome restoration to his father's embrace;—not, however, without a sacrifice, not without blood;—the resurrection of the Son of God, and his return to the bosom of the Father—after really undergoing that death which Isaac underwent only in a figure—might be clearly and strikingly discerned. And in Christ's resurrection, his own resurrection also was involved, as well as the resurrection of all his true children, to the inheritance of eternal glory.

Thus the very transaction which so severely tried the faith of Abraham showed him all that his faith longed so much to see. He saw the day of Christ—the day of his humiliation and triumph—not darkly and dimly as others then saw it, but clearly, distinctly, vividly. He saw the very way in which the salvation of man was to be accomplished, and the blessing purchased for all the families of the earth, by the atoning death and glorious resurrection of the beloved Son of God. And seeing thus gladly the day

of Christ, he saw Christ himself as the Living One;—dead indeed, and sacrificed once for all, yet still living, and by his very death enabled to be the author of life to the "many sons whom he bringeth unto glory" (Heb. ii. 10).

These, then, are the gracious fruits of this trial of Abraham's faith. They are such as the trial of our faith also may yield. For we are tried in the very same way with him. We are called to give up to God the desire of our eyes, the beloved of our hearts;—some dear partner, or child, or friend, around whose brow, in our fond esteem, the halo of many a bright anticipation shone. It is a bitter parting; and it is hard to acquiesce in it,—to consent to it. But it is God's will; and we submit. And what sustains us, but our accounting that God is able to raise him from the dead? Yes; let him depart to be with Christ—and let the once beauteous body rot in the silent tomb to which my own hand consigns it. I know he is not lost after all. My own inheritance now is not on earth but in heaven; and in heaven he will rejoin me again. For myself and for him, I

place all my hope beyond the grave. It is but a little while. "This corruptible must put on incorruption." "The Lord shall appear, and all that are his shall appear with him in glory."

Is my heart wrung with the anguish of that parting hour? Is the bitterness of death felt in my desolate home, and my still more desolate heart? Ah! do I not now enter as I never did before—with a new insight and new sympathy—into the agony of the death endured by him who bore my sins in his own body on the tree? And as I lift my thoughts from this shadowy scene to the region of realities, how does my bosom burn with adoring gratitude and love to that Saviour who has spoiled death of its sting, and the grave of its victory,—who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light!

He calls me to suffer with him now, that we may be "glorified together" hereafter. He would have me to be partaker of his cross, that he may make me partaker of his crown. Through his own day of suffering and shame, issuing in his return to the Father's bosom, he summons me to the hope of that heaven

where he dwells. Am I contented to have all my hope there—and there only? Can I bear to have my portion postponed—my expectation deferred—till the hour when time gives place to eternity? Can I resign myself to the surrender of everything dearest to me here below—friendship, love, happiness,—honour, wealth,—a husband's or a wife's embrace,—a child's fond smile,—a friend's sweet counsel,—not in gloomy submission to fate;—not in stoical and stubborn pride;—not in heartless worldly unconcern; but in firm reliance upon that blessed Redeemer, who has himself passed through much tribulation, and gone to prepare a place for me among the many mansions of his Father's house? And he cometh again,—his risen saints all with him,—to receive me to himself, that I may be with him for ever! Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

IV.

KINSMANSHIP WITH CHRIST IN THE RISEN BODY.

Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God—1 Cor. xv. 50.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.—1 Cor. xv. 53.

Handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.—Luke xxiv. 39.

In connection with the announcement that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,"—with the reason implied in its being added, "this corruptible must put on incorruption,"—a difficulty is sometimes raised. It is founded upon the supposed constitution of our Lord's corporeal nature after his resurrection, as it is seen in the interval between that event and his ascension into heaven. Did he not, during these forty days, perform acts and offices such as ordinary "flesh and blood" performs? And did he not himself appeal to the fact of his having a fleshly body, to prove that it was

not a spirit or mere ghost that appeared to the disciples, but their Lord himself in person?

Now here, generally, it must be remembered that there hangs over the risen Lord's forty days' sojourn on the earth a veil or cloud which the Spirit has not seen fit, by any clear revelation, to remove. Plainly, his manner of life was peculiar, and wholly different from what it was before his death. He did not frequent public places of resort. He did not, as he used to do, worship in the synagogues or in the temple. He was not to be met with familiarly in the common streets and highways, on the mountain-side, or by the sea-shore. He did not go about doing good. He did not even go in and out among his chosen friends, as was his wont in the more private hours of his previous ministry. He was not, as of old, the welcome guest of Lazarus and his sisters in the quiet village of Bethany. He did not live, as if at home, among the apostles; sharing with them common fare and a common purse. All is changed. He shows himself only occasionally, and indeed rarely. And when he does show himself, it is in a strange, mysterious kind of

way, by glimpses and momentary flashes as it were, in brief and hurried interviews,—like "angels' visits, few," if not "far between." He appears and disappears, abruptly, suddenly. He comes, they know not whence. He goes, they know not whither. And none of them ask him, "Where dwellest thou?"

Mary Magdalene, weeping beside the empty sepulchre, hears her name called. It is the well-known voice of love. She turns and cries, "Rabboni, which is to say, Master?" But she is not suffered to embrace her beloved.* She may not tarry to enjoy his company. A short kind message to the brethren she gets. And lo! in an instant, the interview is over (John xx. 1-17).

Two weary travellers are wending their disconsolate way to Emmaus. One draws near, who is apparently, like themselves, a traveller. They do not at first recognise him. He is a stranger; but apparently he is a pious man, who can speak to them of the Messiah's sufferings and glory; and as such they insist on

* See a probable explanation in the author's *Scripture Characters*, xvi.

entertaining him. He blesses, in his own well-remembered form, their humble repast. Their eyes are opened;—they know him. And lo! again on the instant, he ceases to be seen of them: he vanishes out of their sight (Luke xxiv. 13-32).

Twice, in successive weeks, on the first day of the week, the little company are gathered together. For security against intrusion, or against something worse, the doors are shut. Unexpected, unannounced, making a way into the room for himself, the Lord stands in the midst of them. They hear the customary salutation, "Peace be unto you," and are glad. They listen to the few words he has to say. But they seek not to detain him, nor does he offer to remain. He goes as strangely as he came. And whither he goeth they cannot tell (John xx. 19-29).

A party of them go a-fishing at the sea of Tiberias, and all the night they catch nothing. As morning dawns, one who seems to be unknown to them is seen standing on the shore. "Children, have ye any meat?" he asks; and they simply answer "No." Try once again, is

his reply. The miracle which they had seen wrought before at the same spot,—the miracle of an overwhelming draught of fish,—is repeated; —and the beloved disciple says to Peter, "It is the Lord." A conversation thereafter ensues, when they have come on shore, more like the fellowship of former days than what any of them had had with him since he had reappeared. It is for Peter's sake;—it is to meet the affecting case of the fallen apostle. That being done, this scene ends as unaccountably as the rest. Jesus is gone, and they are alone again (John xxi.)

Once again he met the eleven, and as it would seem, a larger number, on Mount Olivet, near Bethany, and in the act of blessing them, was carried up into heaven (Luke xxiv. 50, 51).

Such is the historical evidence of the Lord's manner of existence and intercourse on earth being altogether different, after he rose, from what it was before he died. In the face of this difference, it is scarcely possible to doubt that his natural had become a spiritual body—that it had been raised "in incorruption, in glory, and in power,"—that it was no longer "flesh

and blood," but that substance, whatever it may be, into which "flesh and blood" is to be altered when it is to "inherit the incorruptible kingdom of God" (1 Cor. xv. 50).

But there is one particular instance in which the Lord seems to assert the reverse of all this.

When he first stood in the midst of the disciples, his sudden and inexplicable appearance disconcerted them. "They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit." To reassure them, the Lord simply says, "Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke xxii. 36-43).

This verse is sometimes read and commented upon, as if the risen Saviour on that occasion had used identically the same words which Paul uses, "flesh and blood;" or, as if the words which he did use, "flesh and bones," had identically the same meaning. Hence a very serious difficulty is supposed to arise.

To harmonise the saying of Christ with the doctrine of the apostle,—as they are thus respectively understood,—some have felt themselves shut up to the conclusion, that our Lord's body did not undergo the needful change from corruption to incorruption,—that it did not become a spiritual body,—until his ascension. Until then, in their view, his risen body was of the same kind with his body as it hung on the cross, and as it was laid in the grave. It was on its going into heaven, that it was so transformed from a natural to a spiritual body, as to be fitted for its heavenly immortality.*

There seem to me to be insuperable objections to this solution of the difficulty. I would not, for my part, very willingly acquiesce in the idea of my Lord and Saviour being different, in any material respect, now that he has ascended into heaven, from what he was when he showed himself on earth after his resurrection. I would feel as if I were forced to give up the strongest proof I have by far of his being the same person now, in his exaltation, that he was in

* See Dr. John Brown's *Resurrection to Life*, p. 211.

his humiliation; the same as to his entire humanity, body as well as spirit.

Let me speak as if I were Peter, or John, or any one of those who had been with Jesus. Let me speak, for example, as the beloved John. And I would say—Leave to me the impression which all that I saw of the Lord after he rose confirms, that he is now in heaven,—that he is to be when he comes again,—that he shall be through all eternity,—exactly what he was when he showed himself to us during the memorable forty days;—and I am satisfied. I know that, however the structure of his material frame may have been altered at his resurrection, however it may have been changed from a natural into a spiritual body, it was not so metamorphosed but that I could recognise and identify him, as the very friend on whose bosom I leaned at the supper. And not his spirit merely, or airy unsubstantial filmy ghost, could I thus recognise and identify;—but himself bodily; his very self; seen and felt to be the same as when he touched us upon the mount of glory, or wept with us beside the grave at Bethany, or pitied us amid the agony of the

garden. If, however, you tell me that, changed as I certainly found him to be at his resurrection, he has been still farther changed in his ascension,—you make him, alas! an unknown friend to me. I am to see him again, it is true. But what he may be—what he may be like—when I see him, I cannot guess. He may be so altered that I shall need another Baptist to introduce me to him anew (John i. 35-40). But it cannot be. I remember the angel's word: "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts i. 11). The glimpses which I got of him when in his spiritual body he revisited the earth for a season—glimpses necessarily imperfect and obscure—assure me that, when I have risen as he rose, and my body becomes spiritual like his, we shall know one another in that kingdom of God which flesh and blood cannot inherit;—and shall have fellowship in person one with another, not as during these few weeks, only now and then, but uninterruptedly throughout endless ages.

So John might feel. And so I cannot help

feeling too. To me, as to him, the fact of Christ's bodily nature having undergone all the change it is ever to undergo at the resurrection, and continuing ever since to be such as it was shown to be during the forty days thereafter,—recognisably substantial, and recognisably also the same as it was before death,—is a precious confirmation of that most blessed hope, that in our spiritual bodies, in the heavenly state, we are to know one another and converse with one another; that when I and my brother meet on the resurrection morn; I among the living who are changed, he among the dead who are raised; we shall meet, not as strangers, but as old familiar friends,—to resume some interrupted argument, or labour, or song of love divine,—and to start together on a new course of study, work, and praise, in the realms of cloudless light and everlasting bliss.

The resurrection of the Lord from the dead, therefore, and not his ascension into heaven, must surely be held to be the turning-point as regards the great change which it was necessary should be effected upon his bodily constitution, in order to fit it for the heavenly and eternal

state. Whatever he is, as to his entire humanity, body as well as soul, when he rises from the grave, that he continues to be,—the same thenceforth and for ever.

And yet he speaks of his having still "flesh and bones." How then, it is asked, can Paul say,—"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God"?

The answer is, that the expressions are not identical. Christ did not say—"A spirit hath not flesh and blood as ye see me have:" but—"A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."

Nor is this a mere verbal or technical distinction.

The instances in which the phrase, "flesh and blood," occurs in Scripture are rare.* It is altogether a New Testament phrase. And it has a distinct meaning. It denotes man in his present bodily state, and implies that even at his best, and when doing his utmost, he is unfit while in that state for his eternal heavenly home of light, love, and liberty.

The phrase, "flesh and bones," is quite

* See *Life in a Risen Saviour*, Discourse xvi.

different, and is, as if of set purpose, differently applied. It is twice used in the New Testament; —first, by the Lord on the occasion now before us—"A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have;"—and secondly, by Paul, when, speaking of our oneness as believers with Christ, he says, "We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones" (Ephes. v. 30).

The corresponding Hebrew phrase is used more frequently in the Old Testament, and always, as I cannot but think, with a very definite import. The following examples may suffice :—

1. Adam says of Eve, his wife, as he receives her from the Lord,—"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. ii. 23). 2. Laban salutes Jacob as a kinsman, "his sister's son," when he "runs to meet him, and embraces him, and kisses him, and brings him to his house,"—"Surely thou art my bone and my flesh" (Gen. xxix. 14). 3. Abimelech, paying court to the men of Shechem, "his mother's brethren," reminds them of his relationship to them,—"Remember also that I am your bone and your flesh" (Judges ix. 2). 4. "All the

tribes of Israel," coming to Hebron to make him king, claim a family interest in David,—"We are thy bone and thy flesh" (2 Sam. v. 1). It is Judah that evidently takes the lead in trying this argument. 5. David reproaches the elders of Judah, because, although they were his kindred, they were dilatory in welcoming him as he returned in triumph after Absalom's defeat and death; "Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh; wherefore, then, are ye the last to bring back the king?" (2 Sam. xix. 12). 6. The king appoints Amasa to be captain of the host in the room of Joab, on the ground of relationship,—"Art thou not of my bone and of my flesh?" (2 Sam. xix. 13).

In all these instances, the idea of affinity, of close personal union and family relationship, is implied. A certain oneness of nature is indicated. And the uniting principle or element,—the seat or tie of union,—is not blood, or "flesh and blood," but "flesh and bones."

In regard to this matter of family kinsmanship, I cannot but think that a difference is to be observed between the Scriptural or Jewish

notion, and that of the Gentiles;—with which last, that of the Gentiles, the modern notion of relationship coincides perhaps more nearly than with the other, that of the Jews and the Jewish Scriptures.

In our reckoning, community of blood, or consanguinity, is the chief connecting bond. So it was among the old Gentiles. And hence Paul, at Athens (Acts xvii. 26), speaks of God as having "made of one blood all nations of men." Such a way of expressing the unity of the race is Gentile and Grecian, not Jewish nor according to the Jewish Scriptures. There, oneness in respect of marriage, or in respect of the unions of family and of race that flow from marriage, is expressed by a reference, not to blood, but to flesh and bones. Indeed it would almost seem as if, in this connection, the idea of the blood was studiously and of set purpose avoided.

The blood, let it be borne in mind, was understood among the Jews to be the principle of the animal life. Thus the original prohibition of blood as food (Gen. ix. 4) runs in this form, —"Flesh, with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat." So also in the

Mosaic law (Lev. xvii. 14; Deut. xii. 13), the prohibition is made to rest on the same consideration,—"The life of all flesh is the blood thereof; therefore ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh." "Be sure that thou eat not the blood; for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh." The vitality of the body, as it now exists, in its present mortal state, is held to be in the blood. Hence, when Satan proposes that Job should be tried by the utmost severity of infliction upon his person that is consistent with the sparing of his animal life, he challenges God to "touch his bone and his flesh" (Job ii. 5). No mention is made of his blood. Is not this significant? "His life" is to be "saved" (verse 6); and the blood is the life. The blood, therefore, is spared. It is the bone and the flesh that are touched. He is to be tried in his person, and in his tenderest personal relationships and friendships. "But save his life," says the Lord.

If there is anything in this view, the Jewish mode of expressing kinsmanship, by unity of flesh and bones rather than of blood, bears the

trace or mark of a higher conception than our Gentile phraseology embodies. To say that you and I are "of one blood," is to put our unity upon low ground; upon the ground of our being joint partakers of the same animal nature and lower animal life,—the "life which is the blood." To say that we are "one bone and one flesh,"—that I am "bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh," or you of mine,—if the origin or original meaning of the language is realised,—is to elevate our affinity, our kinsmanship and brotherhood, into a higher region. It is to extricate it from the conditions of the lower economy, in which we are partners with the brutes which perish, and to give it a direction upwards to the state in which humanity is to be perfect, incorruptible, and immortal.

Is it not possible that the words put into the mouth of unfallen Adam on his receiving Eve, his spouse, at the hands of the Lord, may have been intended by the inspiring Spirit for this very purpose,—to place the marriage-union on this higher footing? She "is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh?" We are one, corporeally as well as spiritually one; not,

however, as regards our blood merely, or that lower animal life which is in the blood, but as regards the condition of our human nature which is independent of that life, and above it. And is not the apostle's argument about marriage (Eph. v. 30), in which he uses the identical words which Adam spoke concerning Eve, and applies them to the church's relation to her heavenly Spouse, somewhat remarkable in connection with our present argument? He virtually identifies the union of Christ and his people with the union of husband and wife. He interchanges, as it were, or rather associates, what is spiritual in the one with what is bodily in the other. He gives a corporeal character, in a sense, to the heavenly marriage-union, as well as a spiritual character to the earthly. And in doing so he adopts, surely designedly and deliberately, and not accidentally, the same language which Adam employs in welcoming Eve. "We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones;"—so says the apostle of the heavenly marriage-union. "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;"—so says our first father of the earthly.

Such being the use and wont, if I may so speak, of the Holy Spirit in employing this phrase, "flesh and bones," and such being the marked distinction between it and the other phrase, "flesh and blood,"—is it too much to suppose that the Lord had this very peculiarity of meaning in view when he said,—"A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have"?

He vindicated his corporeity; he asserted his manhood, his bodily manhood, as still a real bodily manhood, after his resurrection. And God be praised that he did so. God be praised, also, that he did so by a more emphatic and convincing proof than his merely partaking of human food would have implied. He did indeed eat once before his disciples (Luke xxiv. 43). That seems to have been the only instance of his doing so; for it is not said that he ate with the two brethren at Emmaus, or with those whom he met at the sea of Galilee. That he condescended, on that one occasion of his first appearance to the eleven gathered together at Jerusalem, to partake of man's ordinary diet, was a most gracious accommodation to the weak faith of his disciples. But on

reflection, they might have felt that this was no more than angels, and he himself as the Angel of the Covenant, had done of old, long before the incarnation; as when the three celestial visitors were entertained by Abraham at noon-day, and the two by Lot at night (Gen. xviii. xix.) They might be thankful for his own surer words addressed first to them all collectively, and then to Thomas in particular; —words most significant of continued corporeity in the resurrection state:—"Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have;"—"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing."

There is, therefore, no real inconsistency between the apostle saying "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," and the risen Lord saying, "I have flesh and bones." The two expressions are quite distinct. The first, "flesh and blood," denotes the human bodily nature, liable to dissolution and decay. The other, "flesh and bones," points rather to its higher spiritual development in a structure

having extension and form,—bones and flesh of some sort,—but not necessarily of a sort resolvable into dust, and perishable. And when the Lord used that phrase to indicate his resumed corporeity, purposely avoiding the former, he may be understood as addressing to his disciples an affecting appeal.

You thought that I was gone, and that you were never to see me more in the flesh. Now, when I appear, you take me for a spirit, from whose approach you shrink as from a strange and alarming phantom. But I have not left you, nor have I taken or received a nature in which you can claim no affinity to me and I have no union and communion with you. My manhood is still such, that in respect of it I may be your kinsman, and you may be to me, what Eve was to Adam, "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh." True, you may not retain me in the body here; I cannot welcome your embraces, as I used to do when I was a sojourner among you; "I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." But I go possessed of a bodily frame in which I am still one with you, and you are still one with

me. We are one, as husband and wife are one, or as brethren in the flesh are one. I claim to be still one of you; of the same body and the same family with you. And I would have you to look upon yourselves as still one with me, of the same body, now spiritually quickened, and of the same family, with me; "members of my body, of my flesh and of my bones."

We surely cannot altogether err in regarding our Lord's remarkable language, especially when interpreted by the scriptural usage, as designed to teach some such lesson as this, ultimately at least, if not immediately, to the apostles and to us. At all events, it is clear that it is no contradiction of the statement that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption."

That statement is the ground on which the apostle rests the assurance that our bodies must and shall undergo such a change as is needful for removing the disqualifications under which they now labour. It must be so, for otherwise we could not enter heaven in the body;—"for

this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." It shall be so, for we are to enter heaven in the body;—"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

What the change is to be, and how it is to be effected, it is needless to inquire particularly. Enough has been said already on that subject. It may be more profitable to notice some practical lessons which it suggests.

I. By an irresistible argument, *à fortiori*, it bars the door against whatever is unholy, impure, sensual, or vile. If even physical corruptibility is inadmissible in heaven, what shall we say of moral defilement? Is the body better than the spirit? If even the righteous cannot pass into these realms of light and glory with a body corruptible and mortal, how think you that you can reach them with mind, heart, and soul, polluted and unclean? How can you, who work iniquity, enter into the kingdom of God, if even sinless flesh and blood cannot inherit it?

Think of the far different doom awaiting you. You, as well as the righteous, survive death. For you, as well as for them, there is a resurrection. But in the Lord's own awful words, it is a "resurrection of damnation!" Your bodies, as well as the bodies of the righteous, will undergo a change then; a change that will make them as indestructible as your immortal spirits are. Oh! what will it be for you to meet your God on that resurrection day!—"unjust still and filthy still!"—furnished with bodies of fearfully enhanced power for evil, and intensified sensibility to pain! What will it be for you to reap in such bodies the bitter, bitter fruits of your sowing to the flesh now! And these bodies, ah! they are made to last for ever. The worm that dieth not will never eat them away. The fire that is not quenched will never consume them. That tremendous sacrifice of righteous retribution is salted with salt for its endless preservation! (Mark ix. 48-50). O ye workers of iniquity, have you no knowledge? Will you not be moved to tremble at the prospect of an eternity like that?

II. How high and holy is that fellowship with Christ into which you are brought, as "members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones!" He took your natural body, corruptible and mortal, that you might take his spiritual body—incorruptible, immortal. In respect of your corporeal as well as your spiritual nature, you are married, you are united to Christ. You who believe are thus thoroughly, out and out, one with him. Yes! you who believe.

O wondrous power of faith! How mighty a spell lies in so simple an act! Only believe, thou doubting, trembling soul. Believe! Christ is near thee saying to thee, Believe! Believe in me, as joining myself in spirit and in body to thee;—to bear thy sin, to atone for thy guilt;—to take thy place, to be thy substitute, thy surety, thine elder brother, thy kinsman-redeemer;—to obey for thee, to suffer for thee, to bring thee back to my Father and thy Father, to my God and thy God. Believe in me also as joining thee in body and in spirit to myself; espousing thee to myself; that thou mayest be a "member of my body, of my flesh and of my bones." Believe in me as sharing with thee

the very corporeity which I have myself; that I may present thee among my brethren before the Father, saying—"Behold I and the children whom thou hast given me."

O wondrous power of faith, uniting thee thus to Christ!. Nay rather, O wondrous power and glory and beauty of him to whom faith unites thee! And what a union! How close, how constant, how comprehensive! Whatever it was necessary should happen to him, must happen also to thee. "The Lord from heaven" could carry to heaven nothing corruptible, nothing mortal, either in himself or in any of his members. Therefore "this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

III. What a motive to be spiritually minded and heavenly minded! And to be so more and more, as our union to Christ grows closer, and the time of our being glorified with him draws nearer!

Our present bodies are corruptible and mortal. In respect of them, we are of the earth, earthy. This condition or quality which now belongs to them, calls for acts and offices which cannot be

omitted with impunity. It entails upon us the necessity of discharging the functions by which life in the individual and in the race is maintained; those functions of the animal organisation and the social economy which in this world repair the waste of corruption and the ravages of death. To neglect these functions—to affect a spirituality that is above them—is folly and sin. The direst consequences have ever come of the attempt. Let it be broadly stated, that as he lives now in the body, man must obey the laws and fulfil the ends of his bodily nature and bodily condition. To do so is plainest duty. But surely it is duty that ought to occupy only a subordinate place in his esteem.

About what shall I be occupied? About things relating to my present body, corruptible and mortal? Or about things that will task to the uttermost the energy of my body, when it shall have become incorruptible and immortal? What is to engage my mind, what is to interest my heart? Is it eating and drinking—marrying and giving in marriage? These are indeed matters with which I must concern

myself; for they involve the life and health of the body as it now is, and of the social state for which, as it now is, the body is adapted. But the body is not to be long what it is now; the social state for which it is now adapted is to pass away. Mortality is to be swallowed up of life. In heaven they "neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither can they die any more; but are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke xx. 35, 36).

Surely the things which should chiefly engage my mind and interest my heart, in the view of what I am then to be, and where I am then to be,—are the pursuits for which my risen body, in that heavenly world, will be adapted, rather than those for which my natural body here on earth is fitted. Surely I should be giving myself to the acquiring of those tastes and habits that will be found to be congenial, wher I am raised in Christ incorruptible, in body a well as in spirit, to be with him in glory fo ever.

IV. Finally, what a reason is there, in th high hope, for patient waiting, all the days

our appointed time, till our change come. Many and bitter are the griefs occasioned by the corruptible and mortal nature of our present bodies, and the sad vicissitudes of the mortal state with which they connect us. Pain, suffering, sickness, disease, rack the limbs and waste the frame. Sorrow and trouble come, through the ravages which death works in this changing world. But courage! O child of God. It is but a little while. The Lord is about to change all things soon. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Yes! "He will swallow up death in victory, and the Lord God shall wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isaiah xxv. 8).

THE END.